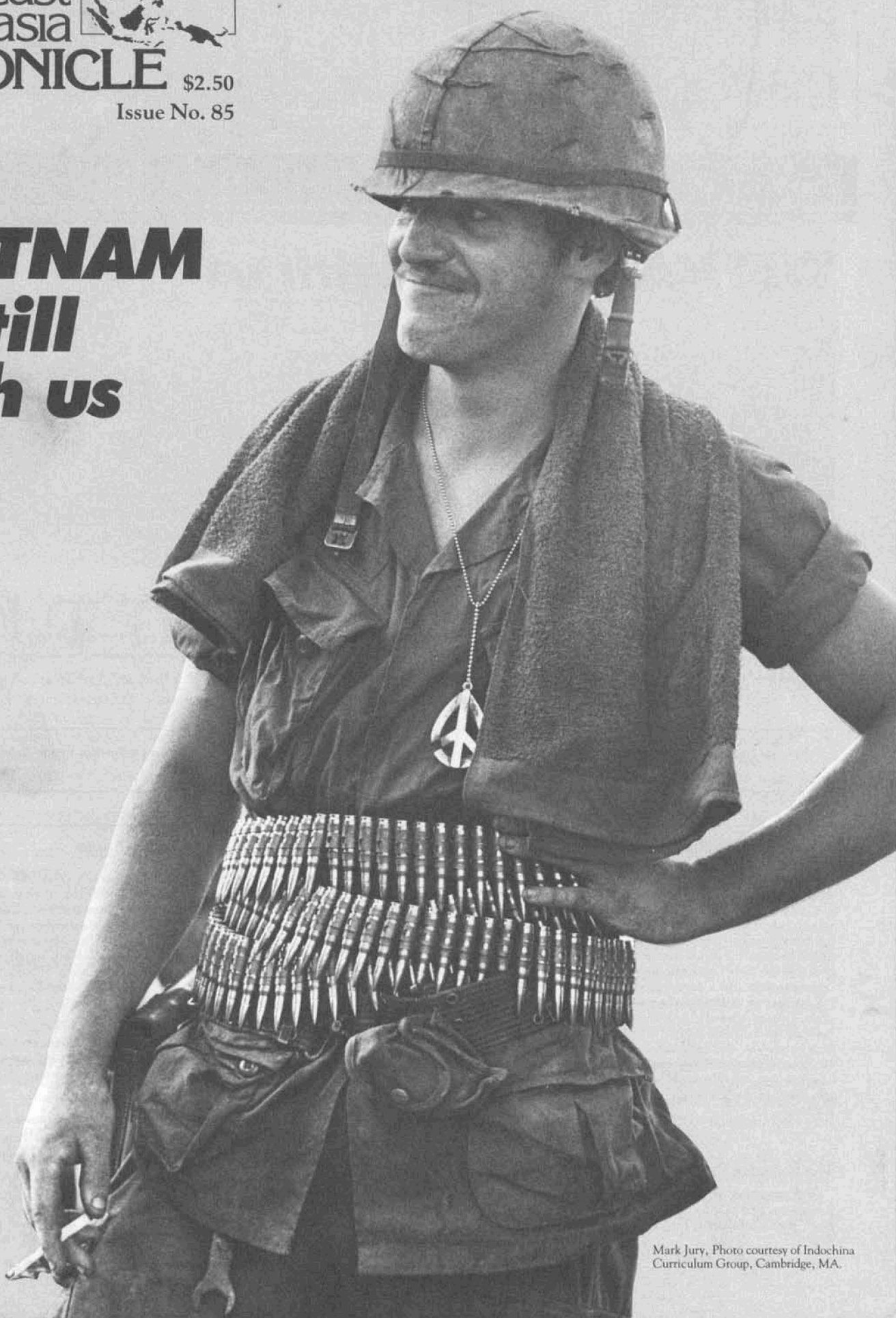




VIETNAM
*is still
with us*





VIETNAM is still with us

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A Note from the Staff

Last year at this time many of you had just received a letter outlining a financial crisis at SRC. We weren't at all sure we would be able to keep the Center alive for another year, and we were extremely grateful to all of you who responded to our appeal for help. This year the situation is different. Our longterm financial prospects are as precarious as ever, but careful budgeting has put us in sound condition for the next few months. And this issue—devoted to a theme we have been talking about for a long time—is testimony to our conviction that the Center has an important role to play.

Last year we celebrated the tenth anniversary of the Center's birth as a child of the anti-war movement, and with this issue we demonstrate that we have not "moved on to other things." We have expanded our focus to include all of Southeast Asia, precisely because we believe Vietnam and the lessons of the Vietnam War are still important and cannot be relegated to an isolated corner of our awareness. We would welcome letters which tell us how you feel about this issue of the *Chronicle* and your ideas about the ways Vietnam is still with us. □

The Resource Center Staff

Staff members are Linda Golley, Chris Jenkins, Santi Mingmongkol, Joel Rocamora, and Martha Winnacker. Research assistance is provided by Bruce Boer, Jane Castellanos, Fred Goss, Judy Henchy, Glenda Pawsey, and Inday Refi.

The Southeast Asia Resource Center

Formerly called the Indochina Resource Center, the SRC is a major non-governmental source of information on current developments in the countries of Southeast Asia, and on the U.S. involvement there. The Center follows and interprets events in Vietnam, Laos and Kampuchea, as well as in Thailand, Malaysia, Indonesia, and the Philippines. This research and analysis continues in the tradition of the Indochina Resource Center, which played a key role from 1971 to 1975 as one of the sources of accurate information for the anti-war movement's successful effort to cut U.S. aid to the Thieu regime.

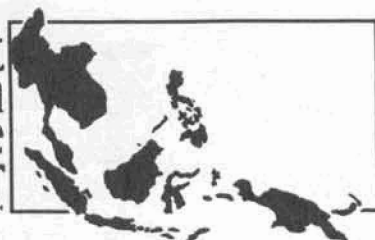
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ABOUT THIS ISSUE

Vietnam is still with us. The end of the American war against Vietnam and the countries of Indochina did not end the experience Americans call "Vietnam." Today, "Vietnam" is the continuing agony of veterans unable to reconcile the realities of a brutal war with a home country opposed to, or worse, indifferent to that war. "Vietnam" is half a million Indochinese refugees struggling to rebuild shattered lives in a strange land. "Vietnam" is the cruel manipulation of the hopes of MIA families. And "Vietnam" is the continuing effort to understand and define the United States' role in the world.

This issue of the *Southeast Asia Chronicle* focuses on these subjects, because these are the ways in which the largest number of Americans now experience the consequences of the Vietnam War. We hope that this effort will contribute to the ongoing process of interpreting and coming to terms with these complex and often confusing experiences. There are, to be sure, major gaps in our coverage, but we believe this issue illuminates both the complexity and the persistent immediacy of

"America's Vietnam" in 1982. It also continues the fight against those people, institutions, and interests who gave us the Vietnam War. The silencing of the guns in 1975 did not end the war over the political interpretation of the Vietnam experience.

The current political war has many fronts. Veterans are fighting against the attempt to depoliticize the emotional and psychological stress they suffer. United Nations officials and other observers of the Indochinese refugee situation have long battled against the U.S. government's one-dimensional characterization of refugees as escapees from communist tyranny. Even the design of the Vietnam War memorial in Washington, D.C., became an occasion for acrimonious debate.

The military defeat of U.S. forces in the field in Vietnam was matched by a political defeat at home. The American public rejected their government's intervention in Vietnam long before the Vietnamese achieved victory in 1975. After the official war was over, this anti-interventionist consensus prevented the United States from intervening militar-

ily in Angola and later in Nicaragua to stop revolutionary forces from taking power.

It is understandable that Gerald Ford, who had to preside over the final U.S. defeat in Vietnam, should have been interested in "putting the Vietnam experience behind us." But the political and military forces which were defeated soon found it necessary to turn from forgetting to reinterpreting the Vietnam experience. National liberation struggles continue to erupt in various parts of the world, and the anti-interventionist "Vietnam syndrome" would have to be dispelled if the United States was going to stop them. The task has fallen on such former military officers as General William Westmoreland, journalists such as Norman Podhoretz and Peter Braestrup, and academics such as Gunther Lewy. Their arguments range from being historically inaccurate and downright ridiculous to elaborate and sophisticated.

The many efforts to revise the history of the Vietnam War cluster around two points: *post facto* justification of U.S. political goals in Vietnam, and alloca-

tion of blame for the defeat to the anti-war movement. Without the blood bath they predicted to justify their position, the revisionists argue that the United States was correct in fighting against an enemy who now brings us reeducation camps and refugees "voting with their feet."

It is tempting to accept the revisionists' conclusion that the Vietnam War was lost in the United States, for it makes our role as anti-war activists more important historically than it actually was. But we cannot. While the erosion of public support for the American role in the war was certainly a key factor, the victory belongs to the Vietnamese. The anti-war movement's impact would not have been significant if the Vietnamese had not been winning.

The two arguments are intertwined. The first attempts to restore political respectability to U.S. intervention in Third World conflicts in the name of anti-communism, while the second seeks to smear opposition to intervention as close to treason. As long as the United States was not directly involved in Third World struggles—as during the Carter Administration—the Vietnam syndrome debate proceeded at a leisurely pace. It was Ronald Reagan and rapidly intensifying U.S. involvement in El Salvador which brought the issue forward again as a major policy debate.

Reagan's own attempts to rewrite the history of the Vietnam War have been too clumsy to take seriously. The only serious argument in his administration's attempt to deny a parallel between Vietnam and El Salvador is that no U.S. troops are fighting in El Salvador. This assumes that American opposition to intervention abroad arises mainly from a fear of U.S. casualties. In fact, however, El Salvador is already "Vietnam." U.S. involvement has reached such a scale that the United States is now the main enemy of the liberation forces. While there are differences between the right wing faction in the Salvadoran government and the Reagan Administration, the United States now determines the main outlines of Salvadoran military and political strategy against the liberation forces. We do not need to wait for a Tonkin Gulf incident in the Caribbean before we recognize that El Salvador is already an American war.

But there are important differences in the international context in which the war in El Salvador is developing. Defeat in Vietnam weakened the U.S. position as a world power.

Anti-imperialist forces, on the other hand, have grown significantly stronger. Liberation movements in Central America and Africa have made dramatic gains. At the same time, the Soviet Union has achieved nuclear parity with the United States, making it difficult to use nuclear blackmail when limited force fails.

Despite Reagan's claims to the contrary, the anti-interventionist Vietnam syndrome continues to set limits on U.S. actions abroad. The movement to stop U.S. intervention in El Salvador has already reached a scale inconceivable in the analogous early years of the Vietnam War. Key sectors of the news media,

The "Vietnam syndrome" will have to be dispelled if the U.S. is going to fight liberation movements.

universities, churches, and even Congress are opposed to the current U.S. role in El Salvador—without any U.S. combat troops in the field.

The region-wide coordination of liberation forces in Central America places military limits on the United States' ability to escalate its intervention in El Salvador. At the same time, diplomatic recognition of the Salvadoran liberation front by Mexico, Venezuela, France, and the Netherlands has generated pressure for negotiations instead of the military solution U.S. strategists prefer. Such limits did not begin to affect U.S. policy in Vietnam until much later in the conflict.

It is in this context of restraints from

domestic and international sources that the Reagan Administration is undertaking to reconstruct the U.S. capacity for intervention. This requires more than reviving the ideological consensus, however, for the Vietnam syndrome also generated concrete changes in American political life. Congress has set limits on the executive's war-making powers; there is no draft; the FBI and the CIA cannot operate as freely as they once did. These principles have already been eroded, but they will have to be discarded if any administration is to have the power to intervene the way the United States did in Vietnam.

Finally, because Reagan has set his sights on rebuilding a nuclear first-strike capability—an enormously risky and expensive goal—he has to make radical changes in American society. Reagan's massive rearmament program in the context of a deep and long recession requires major cutbacks in social services and a program of incentives to big business which has already rolled back many of labor's hard-earned gains of the past two decades.

Among draft-age men, among minority people, among the targets of FBI harassment, among members of Congress, among unions, even among the aged, Reagan's drive to regain an interventionist capability has won him enemies. The link between intervention and deteriorating living conditions in the United States is clearer than it has ever been. If progressive forces can demonstrate the linkage strongly enough to move people to action, we could see the formation of the most powerful anti-intervention movement ever in U.S. history. □

VIETNAM IN COLOR

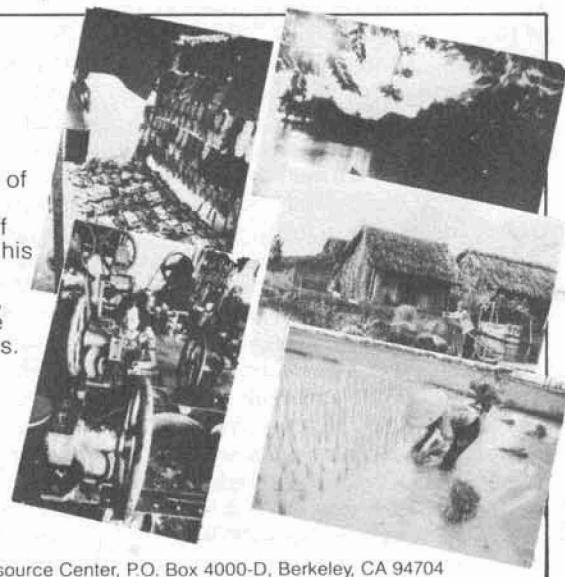
The Southeast Asia Resource Center has just published a set of five full-color postcards of Vietnam—photos taken by staff member John Spragens, Jr. on his 1980 visit, showing the life and work of the Vietnamese people, North and South. The cards are "continental" size—4 x 6 inches.

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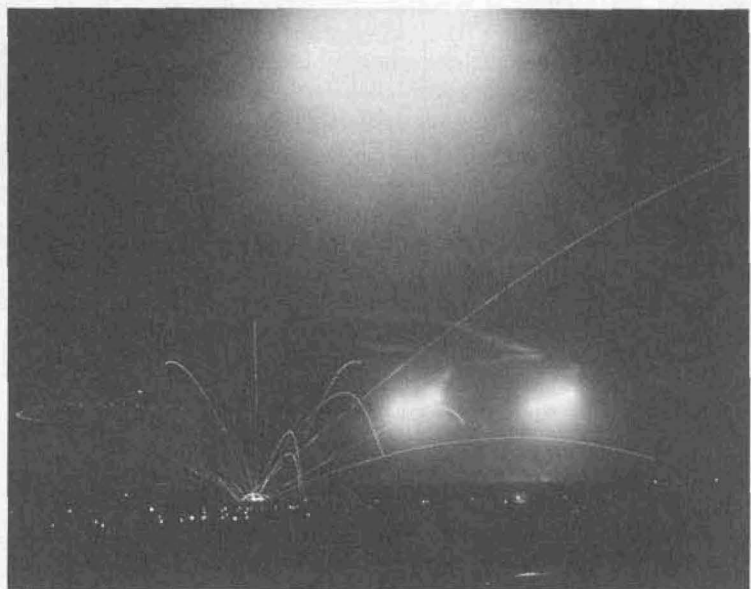
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REINTERPRETING THE VIETNAM EXPERIENCE



U.S. Air Force

Stakes are high in the political struggle over the lessons of Vietnam.

JS: Ten or 15 years ago we were hearing about revisionism in American history, and it meant people who were talking about "empire" as a part of the American way of life. Now we're hearing the word revisionism again—this time it's referring to people who argue that the United States was right in Vietnam. What's happening these days in American writing about the Vietnam war and how much of that writing is serious history?

MARR: The basic idea of revisionism in let's say the 60's among historians was to look at the cold war again and assess who was responsible for the polarization of the world between the Soviet and the capitalist bloc. The revisionists took the position that the Soviet Union was no more responsible than the United States for that polarization. Now I think the conservatives are using that term very consciously as a way of getting a dig back at the liberal-left historians. They're using it in their own way for a very different issue, which is assessing the meaning of the Vietnam war and the Vietnam experience for the United States.

JS: What are they saying? Are they really writing about history or is it just at the level of an ideological argument?

MARR: Some of these revisionists are historians. Some are not. Basically the revisionists today are trying in their own terms to counter what they see as the dominant judgment on the war during the 1970's—that is, that America failed, was not engaged in a legitimate operation in Vietnam, should have never gone in, should never have remained, and should have gotten out as quickly as possible. These people are trying to reassess that and come up with some different conclusions.

SRC staff members John Spragens and Chris Jenkins conducted this interview with David Marr on June 28, 1982. Marr, who holds a Ph.D. in Vietnamese history from the University of California at Berkeley, is a professor at the Research School of Pacific Studies of the Australian National University, Canberra. His most recent book is titled Vietnamese Tradition on Trial 1920-1945

CJ: Who are the revisionists? Where are they coming from?

MARR: I think the first time the term was used was in reference to Gunter Lewy's book, *America in Vietnam*, which came out in 1978. He's primarily criticizing Westmoreland as a military commander but also the political leadership of that day for not attempting a different strategy. He gives considerable attention to the pacification program and feels that it was sadly neglected. The main point is that he feels we could have won. A lot of this centers around the question of what it means to "win" in Vietnam. In his terms it would have been to reduce the National Liberation Front to the level of social bandits which would have been controlled by a police force—a very large police force, perhaps, as in many countries supported by the United States in the world. A second major revisionist work came out at the end of last year—Norman Podhoretz's *Why We Were in Vietnam*. Podhoretz is more concerned with the question of whether or not our motives were good. He goes to great lengths to establish the pure, sincere intentions of the policymakers from the early 60's, giving particular attention to Kennedy and then, of course, Johnson and Nixon. He's trying to get at what he sees as the dominant interpretation that the war was morally wrong. He feels that even if the war was unwinnable, we were still morally obliged to fight in Vietnam. A number of reviewers have commented that this is akin to saying no matter how many people you kill, if your cause is morally just, it has to be done.

CJ: It seems to me that a number of people who were in power during the various war administrations are peppering the literary market with some of these revisionist views as they write their memoirs.

MARR: One of the first memoirs to come out was that of William Westmoreland (*A Soldier Reports*, Doubleday, 1976). He was anxious to establish that his record was clean and that it was the fault of the political leadership in Washington that the war was lost. This has raised a whole series of questions that are being tackled more recently. Podhoretz develops the theme in more detail: the war was lost in Washington, in Congress, and

by the anti-war movement. The issue of "who lost Vietnam," as if it were ours to lose.

CJ: . . . the fifty-first state.

MARR: Yes. Getting at Westmoreland more particularly, the Mike Wallace program ("The Uncounted Enemy: A Vietnam Deception," a 90-minute documentary aired on January 23, 1982) dealt with the question of "cooking the books" or playing the numbers game. Mike Wallace showed that Westmoreland falsified down the number of NLF troops in the country just prior to the 1968 Tet offensive. I don't know about the accuracy of the Mike Wallace presentation—that's developed into quite a controversy itself. The most important thing there was not the argument over how many enemy there were or were not at any given point in time. The real point is that they went so far as to alter the data base that had been developed during the previous years. Two of the people interviewed on the program admitted that, in an effort to prevent serious examination of these numbers by the people in Washington, the data base was changed just after Tet. Now this gets us into the issue of what is the purpose of intelligence in warfare. The man who changed the data base did not approve of tampering with the records, but he had been ordered to do it. They were afraid that this information would be used for political purposes, and they wanted to prevent someone from having access to it. The primary purpose of intelligence or information in warfare is to defeat the enemy. They were in effect destroying their own capacity to use that information.

CJ: It's almost as if they viewed the enemy as the public at home.

MARR: That's right.

JS: How do revisionists view the role of the press?

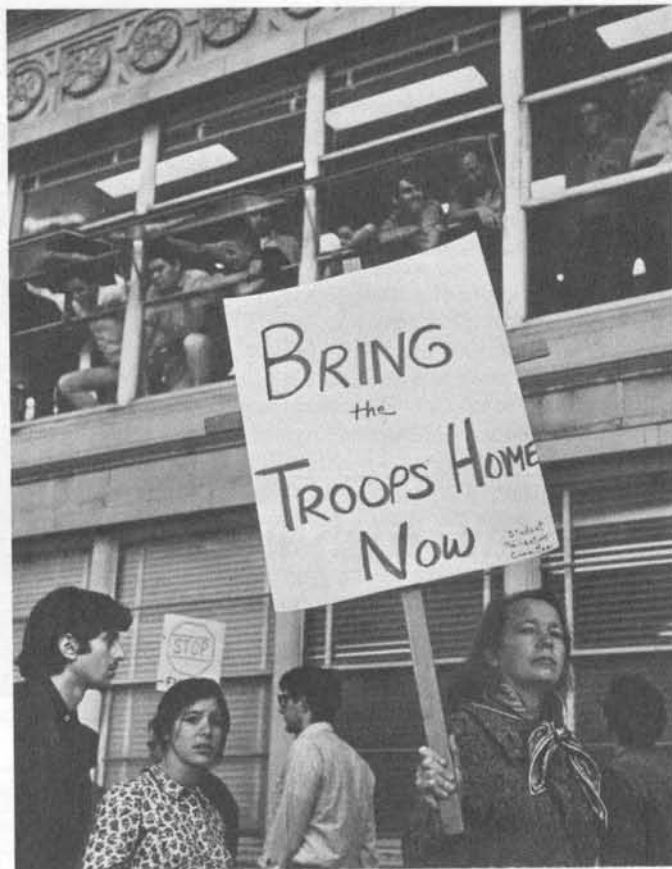
MARR: There are a lot of attacks going on now against journalists and against the television medium during the Vietnam war. It began in a serious vein with Peter Braestrup's book (*Big Story: How the American Press and Television Reported and Interpreted the Crisis of Tet 1968 in Vietnam and Washington*, Westview Press, 1977) on the Tet offensive or, more precisely, the writing by and the television coverage by Americans of the

The revisionists today are trying to counter the idea that we were wrong in Vietnam.

Tet offensive and the effect it had in the United States. This issue of the role of the press in a democracy is obviously going to be with us permanently. In World War II the system was one of censorship. Journalists were brought into the confidence of commanders at all levels and their writings and radio broadcasts were carefully screened and censored . . .

JS: . . . the way that reports from the British Task Force, for example, during the Falklands war have been.

MARR: Exactly. That system was used in World War II but not in the Korean war, or the Vietnam war. Now, in both cases, war was not declared, so the problem for President Truman in Korea and for Kennedy and Johnson in Vietnam was how much freedom do you give to these reporters in ferreting out the news. They decided that they would not impose that regimen on the reporters, I think, largely because they were afraid of political repercussions. Since it was an undeclared war, they were afraid of being accused of managing the news. The best example I can recall is when Halberstam was reporting the 1963 Buddhist



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struggle against Diem. Kennedy became extremely upset and put pressure on the *New York Times* to recall Halberstam. Now Kennedy could have gone the next step and instituted rules which would have had the same effect. For some reason he did not, and that set a precedent which was carried through. Probably he and others didn't realize what the impact of television and the evening news—Walter Cronkite and Company—would be: people sitting down at their dinner tables and seeing huts being zipped and atrocities in Vietnam. The important question is, are you going to start blaming the journalists for what they reported? I think that can be put in the same category with blaming the anti-war movement or blaming any other group when it was the overall system and the overall policy that was responsible for losing the war.

JS: It's interesting that the Saigon government never took an initiative to impose censorship. It shows their lack of sovereignty in the situation. It also makes an interesting comparison with the situation facing reporters in El Salvador. People I know who have reported from Vietnam and have gone to El Salvador say it's much more scary in El Salvador, because journalists have been killed by hit squads. As far as I know this never happened in Vietnam except in the case of the French reporter Paul Leandre who was killed in the final weeks of the war.

CJ: I want to make the point though that as one tries to blame the press or blame the anti-war movement or even blame the military for losing the war in Vietnam, we shouldn't forget that there were people who won the war and that we might pause to give them credit too. There was another side that the revisionists aren't really talking about.



MARR: If there's any continuity between the writers of the 1970's and the writers of today, even though their politics are quite different, it is that most of them are still talking about America in Vietnam and Vietnam as an American problem and the implications of Vietnam for America elsewhere. Very few books, very few articles have even begun to get at the question of what the war meant to the Vietnamese, who, after all, had to do most of the fighting and dying. Unless they get at that issue—the effort to take the war and the struggle and the social consequences as a totality—they're not going to be able to draw the necessary lessons about Vietnam.

CJ: I'd say that part of the reason that we hear so little about the Vietnamese point of view is that very few of the people who are interpreting the experience to us have been to Vietnam or have studied Vietnamese history or indeed speak or read the Vietnamese language.

JS: . . . or if they were in Vietnam, they did not get much exposure to Vietnamese people and the way that these people thought about what was going on in their country when they were there.

MARR: When you look at the fiction that has been written about Vietnam since the war, I'm not aware of any work of fiction that has put forth a believable Vietnamese character. There are a few cardboard prostitutes, but there's no character that I've seen that has any depth, any perception on the part of the author. Again, it's a reflection of their inability, at least at this point, to get at the issue.

JS: Do you think people really read the books that have been published about the war? How does this rarified academic debate filter into the public consciousness or does it at all?

MARR: I wouldn't call it a rarified atmosphere at this point. It's more down in the gutter somewhere. Take Podhoretz's book, for example. It's done entirely on the basis of secondary materials. It's an attempt to take a clear-cut idea and find the necessary secondary materials to support that thesis. It's being shot to pieces even by people who are by no means radicals or leftists. I think they'll have to come up with something better than that to be taken seriously. But, meanwhile, because of the reviews and the press attention, some of the ideas are getting out in the daily newspapers. I think Podhoretz does strike a responsive chord for many Americans. They want desperately to believe that our motives were right—that our intentions

were good in Vietnam. Somehow things went wrong, somehow we failed but we were right to make the attempt. I think the majority of Americans still want to believe that.

JS: What's happening to the war in high school textbooks?

MARR: The textbook market in America is a very specific phenomenon. It's very competitive, so you're always trying to undercut your competitor by reducing the common denominator of your presentation. And in a lot of places it's not teachers who choose textbooks but school boards or even state

Very few people have tried to understand what the war meant to the Vietnamese.

committees. They're all subject to political pressure. So for the Vietnam war you will try to find out what are the most common public attitudes about the war, and you will repeat those in one form or another. To give an example, most of the texts that are now being used present Vietnam until 1975 as two countries, a North Vietnam and a South Vietnam and argue that any effort by the people in the north to involve themselves in conflict in the south was aggression in the same way as Hitler moving into Czechoslovakia. Vietnam, of course, has been one country since 1802 at least and many times before that.

JS: And of course the 1954 Geneva Accords recognized that fact.

MARR: Yes. This whole issue during the war, of course, was



Americans shop for souvenirs in Saigon, 1967.

© John Spengler, Jr.

crucial to the American government's argument that it was necessary to bomb north Vietnam as a foreign outside presence, an alien element in the south. Most of the textbooks today continue that theme and have not been challenged as far as I know. Another example would be the question of the negotiations. The textbooks generally make statements such as that Johnson tried to get the North Vietnamese to come to the negotiating table in the mid-60's, but they were not interested. That simply is a perversion of the diplomatic history of that period. I hope that some of these high school teachers will be products of the 60's themselves and will be able to talk to their students and give them a different perspective. But we can't assume that. The longer it goes on, the less it will be clear in their minds, and you'll have younger teachers coming in.

CJ: I was wondering if the present or future state of Vietnamese studies in the United States or in the world—you would have the perspective from Australia—will be providing us with the Vietnamese perspective that you see lacking in the writing about the war in Vietnam.

MARR: Well, there's presently no place in the United States or in North America where you could, in good conscience, recommend a student who wanted to specialize in Vietnam, period. Not just the modern history of Vietnam but any aspect of Vietnam. There's simply no ongoing study of Vietnam anywhere in the United States. There are good libraries and there are a few people with teaching positions, but generally they are in places where the libraries are not.

CJ: Many of the revisionists base their "I told you so" arguments on the post-liberation difficulties in Indochina—the mass killings in Kampuchea, the economic difficulties in Vietnam. In their view, this justifies our past involvement in Vietnam.

MARR: Certainly, someone like Norman Podhoretz argues that "look and see what has happened in Vietnam and particularly in Cambodia since 1975, this is what we have allowed by

They don't talk about American policies toward Vietnam since 1975.

our moral withdrawal, our moral abandoning of the cause in Indochina." Once again this raises the issue that got us into Indochina in the first place, and that is to make Indochina "safe for democracy." We are assuming that because things in Indochina have in the view of many Americans been unsatisfactory from a social, economic and political point of view since 1975 that we could have done it better.

JS: They seem to look at American policies only up to 1975 when the war ended. Somehow they don't talk about American policies toward Vietnam since 1975 and how those policies have affected what Vietnam is today.

MARR: We shouldn't forget the effects of the war. The bombing, the herbicides, the social dislocation and disruption, the destruction were in themselves events of terrible magnitude for the Vietnamese, Kampuchean and Lao people. That helps to account in large part for what has happened in those countries since 1975.

CJ: I wonder if the anti-war movement might be responsible in some way for this revisionist criticism, which capitalizes on the fact that times have been tough for the Vietnamese since 1975. The anti-war movement painted a somewhat romantic picture of Vietnamese communism and set up certain expectations



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which were perhaps not realistic, and when those expectations were not fulfilled it became easier for critics to adopt the "I told you so" attitude.

JS: And for people who were in the anti-war movement to become disillusioned.

MARR: Yes, I think that there's no doubt that that is the case. It goes back to the point I made earlier about the vast majority of Americans not understanding much about what was happening in Vietnam nor really wishing to understand very much. This was true of the anti-war side of the spectrum almost as much as it was of the side that supported the war. They wanted to retain a vision which was drawn from their own psychological needs. They never tried very hard to test those propositions against the reality in Vietnam.

CJ: What's happened to the domino theory in the treatment of the war by revisionists? Podhoretz, for instance, feels that the Vietnamese domination of Laos and its invasion into Kampuchea and the occasional incursions into Thailand are evidence of falling dominos. He even cites the presence of Cuban forces as Soviet proxies in Angola as evidence of another Vietnam domino.

MARR: Well, others would argue that the real dominos that



United Artists

Scene from "Apocalypse Now."

the U.S. was worried about all along were not Cambodia and Laos but, as Eisenhower phrased it one time, the tin mines of Malaya, the Straits of Malacca, Singapore and beyond—Australia, whatever. There has never been an argument that I've seen that there's something economically substantial or militarily significant in Laos and Cambodia that America must have access to. If you look at it from that point of view, you can argue that from the American point of view two tiny dominos toppled. But if you look at it from the other direction, the strengthening of ASEAN as a quasi-security bloc is to America's advantage. That is often ignored when talking about dominos.

CJ: At the annual meeting of the Veterans of Foreign Wars in August 1980 Reagan said that Vietnam was a "noble cause" and that "for too long we have lived with the Vietnam Syndrome." Just this spring Vice President Bush declared that the Vietnam syndrome was over. What is the Vietnam syndrome, as you understand it, and why is the Administration so eager to declare it over?

MARR: President Reagan was obviously trying to deal with a key problem for his administration. People are extremely skeptical about increased military commitments overseas—in particular in El Salvador. He looks on the Vietnam experience as a restricting factor on his freedom of action in foreign policy. I think that now the majority of Americans are much less willing to sanction massive military involvement overseas. How long that will last, I don't know. Historical memories are remarkably short. So that is a lesson that has been taken to heart by many people not only on the left—this need to judge seriously and critically every major military commitment overseas.

CJ: Revisionists, particularly Norman Podhoretz, have charged that the United States has a "weakened will" or "diminished power" in the world today as a result of losing the war in Vietnam.

MARR: Yes, that's his view of the consequences of the Vietnam syndrome. President Ford had the term in mind when in 1975, after the liberation of Saigon, he asked that people forget about these matters and go on to other things. He was afraid people would become locked into recriminations. Instead there was an attempt by many people at that time to avoid thinking about the Vietnam war. But I think any psychologist could have told you that wasn't going to be possible indefinitely.

We may be in for a real backlash.

JS: Ford's plea that we should forget about and not even talk about the war was echoed recently in a column by Maxwell Taylor (*Washington Post*, Feb. 5, 1982) responding to a column by William F. Buckley (*Washington Post*, Feb. 2, 1982). Buckley had suggested opening hearings that would reexamine the conduct of the war. Taylor's response was that we shouldn't do that. He said, "At best it would likely result in little more than an outburst of divisive vindictiveness and hard feelings which I hoped we had learned to suppress. This is something we do not need."

MARR: It's interesting that Buckley came back in a subsequent column (*Washington Post*, Feb. 18, 1982) to express outrage at General Taylor's position. Buckley has wanted to avoid serious confrontation in the past, but now he seems to favor an examination of the wounds.

CJ: I wonder if this means the right wing is getting ready for a



witch hunt to look for the people who "lost" the war. . . . Samuel Huntington made an interesting comment in an interview in the Summer 1981 issue of *International Security*. He speculates what will happen when many of the generation of people who were "burned" during the Vietnam era start assuming high-level roles in the foreign policy establishment and what impact their experience will have as future administrations make foreign policy.

MARR: I think that ought to be taken very seriously. What Huntington has in mind is the number of people from the military and in the State Department and other organizations reaching higher levels of policy importance—people for whom their formative experience was the war and who felt a deep personal loss when America failed in Vietnam. We talked earlier about Podhoretz using the term "weakened will" and "diminished power." The latter phrase, in particular, brings up machismo images of losing one's sexual potency. I think all these people have a very deep personal grievance in relationship to Vietnam, and this will be reflected in their attitudes. And the higher they get the more it will be a problem. Or in Huntington's terms, an advantage. In the State Department I already hear that there are people who froth at the mouth at the mention of the word Hanoi.

CJ: We may be in for a real backlash later on. What we see now may be just the beginning of a trend.

MARR: On the other hand, there were those who were "burned" by the Vietnam experience in another way—especially the Vietnam veterans. I would see them as getting out from under their very defensive and pained picture of the world to a more positive involvement in politics. If that happens they can become a very significant element. After all, there are two-and-a-half million of them. □

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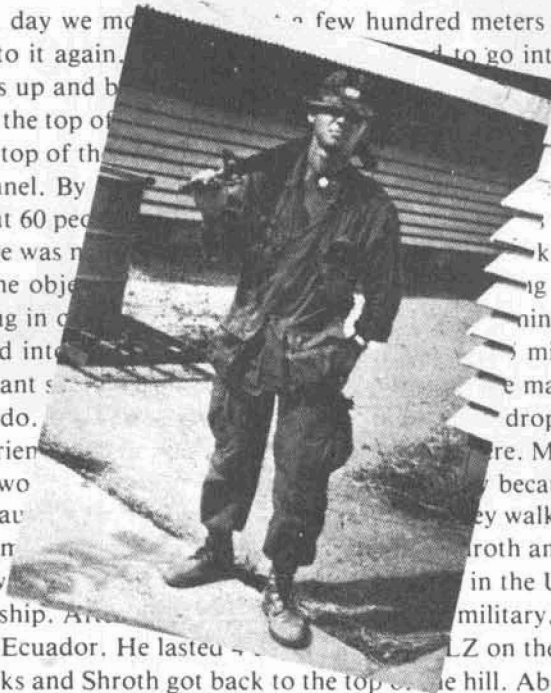
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The next day we moved a few hundred meters up the trail and went right back into it again. They'd fire us up and back down the other side. By June 10 we had gotten to the top of the hill, we had been cut down to about 60 people. We set up on top of this hill. There was no wasn't told the objective.

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THE SOLDIER-CYNICS: VETERANS STILL CAUGHT IN A WAR

Politicians and psychologists
deny the political
importance of Vietnam
veterans' experiences
and insights.

Clark Smith

Who was the man who came home from the war? Was he an infantry "grunt," serving out his tour of duty in the flat, canal-laced Mekong Delta country of southernmost Vietnam? Or did he "hump" the rugged mountains of the Central Highlands along the Laotian border? Did he patrol the sandy, coastal plain in northern "Eye" Corps or guard the perimeter of a forward firebase in an interior valley? Was he an airborne trooper moving from landing zone to landing zone, a doorgunner in an army aviation unit or an air medevac person taking out the dead and wounded? Was he a clerk in a rear area communications unit, did he repair trucks, spray herbicide, examine intelligence reports or provide resupply? Even though the experience of the war is diverse, the general stateside sensibility is that a veteran was merely someone who came home from *that* war, a person attached to a singular experience and reduced to his simplest dimension.

How former service men and women experienced the war in Vietnam depends very much on their military assignment as well as on when and where they were in Vietnam. Shifts in the military environment altered the substance of military life. Circumstances varied from one tactical area of operations to

another. Command capabilities made for subtle and shifting attitudes and actions. Though various overriding features of the war provided some degree of uniformity, still, in judging the character of the war experience of Vietnam veterans, it is important to recognize its individuality. The individual character of the experience in the Vietnam combat zone is an important determining factor in the post-war lives of those who served American military policy in Southeast Asia.

Approximately one-seventh of the service personnel in a combat zone are infantry troops—those men whose purpose is to confront the enemy on the field of battle. But because of the nature of the Vietnam war—a vast conventionally-trained military occupation force superimposed upon a guerrilla war—more than half of those who served frequently came under attack in base camps or rear areas. Don Watkins, Headquarters and Headquarters Battery, 9th Infantry Division Artillery, comments:

In a war like Vietnam, there's no battle line. So the distinction between the guy out in the field and the guy in the rear is somewhat artificial. During and after Tet [Offensive] the battle went from the rice paddies, the mountains and the valleys right into the cities and base camps, went *through* some base camps. Going down the street you could always

Clark Smith is a director of the Winter Soldier Archive.



run into a mine; it only takes one bullet, one mine, one booby trap.

The artificiality of the distinction between combat veteran and rear echelon is real enough if base camps are hit with rockets and mortars. The character of the war made *all* service in the combat zone seem dangerous, and it often was. If "combat veteran" is broadened to include half of all veterans and if the majority of veterans began their Vietnam tour to take them into

"I didn't lose the war. I won; I survived."

the Tet Offensive of 1968, then a distinct majority have developed attitudes formerly applicable to a minority of veterans of previous wars.

Add to this singular feature of the war the rotational system, which placed the soldier or Marine in this precarious combat situation for 12 months (13 for Marines). Short-term exposure to combat heightened the stress factors by making duty seem even more precarious. Also, the average age of the veteran when he was inducted was 19; veterans turned 20 years old in Vietnam. Vietnam stress was imposed on the least mature of the adult community. As one veteran put it: "Vietnam was all our lives!" To be taken from the local familiarities of home and thrust into military life, then shipped to Vietnam to be mortared and rocketed, ambushed and booby-trapped is a jarring experience. New political and social attitudes are formed on the spot. Initial stresses are compounded by further stress; for example, a war prolonged through poorly formulated or mistaken policies and a homefront increasingly at odds with those policies. The veteran was returned home at 21 (on the average) with that terrible value which is the direct result of the combat experience: Nihilism.

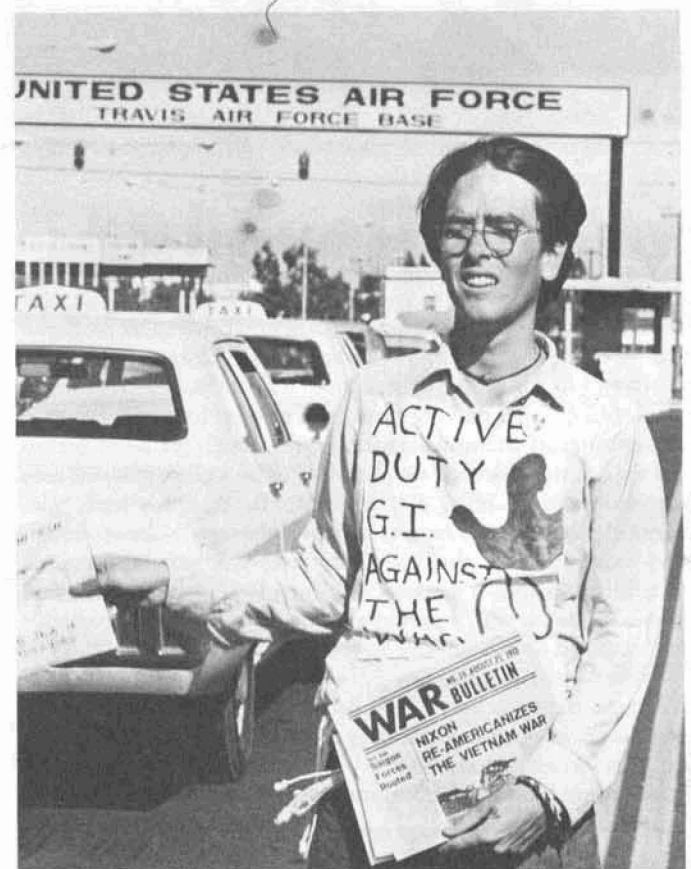
War points the way to the destruction of all values. The net effect of the war on the veterans, especially in the aftermath of the Tet Offensive when the fortunes of the American war effort slid into rapid decline, was the creation of the soldier-cynic—the non-believer. Some time around the rise of the anti-war movement and the strategic defeat of the American military command, the Vietnam soldier no longer accepted the rationale for the war. This spiritual disquiet was carried from barracks to billet, from shelter-half to foxhole. The realization dawned that troops sent to fight communism were, in reality, at war with the Vietnamese people—or a goodly number of their most determined representatives. Respect for the enemy, or Mr. Charles as he was sometimes called, deepened cynicism as confidence in the "ideals" of the war

collapsed. In such circumstances the soldier could then only believe in the authority of the military command. But the military command could not hold a soldier's respect for long.

Within the military establishment two wars were waged. A professional's war for merit and promotion and a draftee's war for survival (to which the enlistee inevitably was attached by age and rank). These "classes" were pitted against each other. Loss of confidence in the public rationale for war was paralleled by loss of confidence in the military command. Former Sergeant Watkins noted:

I had only one side of the story, and then you get all the horror stories, but my impression was that we were still doing basically a good thing. But when Tet happened, it became clear that we were getting our asses kicked. Which made me think about officers and what *they* were doing, about leadership, but leadership *there* [in Vietnam]. Other people seemed to think about the politicians and what's going on at home. . . . It was real clear to me that what was going on at home had no impact once you got to the [battle]field. These local commanders had this control and they were blowing it. I was focused on what these colonels and majors were doing . . . I figure they sold out. I don't think they had the guts to stand up to whatever part of the power structure was making them do the things they knew did not work. . . . They continued to do it and some of them paid the price, I mean some of them died. But mostly what happened was GIs died.

When the soldier could no longer accept the "ideals" of the war and could not believe in the wise judgment of the command, he could then only fall back on himself. As Steve Hassna, 2nd of 327, 101st Airborne noted: "I didn't lose the war, I won; I survived."



The veteran of the war came home encapsulated in cynicism, tortured by anger, grieving for lost friends. He confronted a sometimes hostile, sometimes indifferent, usually uncomprehending community of family, friends, and acquaintances. On his way home, as a final statement of his alienation and disgust, he discarded the outward manifestation of his military identity. As former Specialist 4 John Imsdahl, also of the 101st Airborne, commented on his arrival with a busload of Vietnam veterans going home:

We all climbed on the buses they had waiting and they sent us to Seattle-Tacoma Airport. When we got there, everybody got off that damned bus and beelined it for the men's room. I was in the second bus. By the time I got there, there was forty uniforms stuffed in the urinals and toilets with Silver Stars on them, Purple Hearts. It didn't matter. New Class-A uniforms stuffed in garbage cans—all dumped for civilian clothes.

But the shedding of the uniform could not immediately eliminate the military identity. The experience remained. Only the veteran professionalized in his Vietnam service of the "early war" of late 1965 and 1966 was likely to be reprieved from these attitudes.

Veterans came home to watch the war on television—certainly a first in American veteran history. What they so often saw was in conflict with what they experienced, which sharpened their cynicism. They remained caught, too, between a

The veteran came from the agonies of war to find home more or less the same.

government forced to defend bankrupt war policies and a public outraged or confused by the war. The My Lai exposure riveted attention on present and former soldiers alike. As former Sergeant Hassna remarked, "It put every swinging dick on trial." Though a small but vocal group of veterans was able to vent its anger against the war, most merely hid. Former Sergeant Ernie Boitano, 3rd of the 47 Mobile Riverines, describes his reaction:

We were alienated by our peers—the people we were going to end up associating with back in the States, back in the world. We felt lost. From '68 to '70 there was such a big transition in social consciousness in the United States. People were saying, "What the hell are we doing [in Vietnam]? Then all of a sudden people were saying things like, "The guys coming back from Vietnam ought to be put in detention camps." I can't remember whether it was *Newsweek* where there was talk about doing psychoanalysis to make sure they could adjust Vietnam veterans so they could fit back into society. All I wanted to do was pull a blanket over my head and go through everything incognito. For the most part, vets would not talk to anybody about what happened.

Boitano added, "The hardest thing for me was when someone told me, 'You haven't changed a bit.'"

From the veterans' point of view, they were light years away from those who were otherwise their peers. They tucked away the experience of the war even though it represented the most momentous event of their young lives. Only those for whom the experience lacked impact or understanding, who missed the moral dilemma, could speak openly about it. Not so for those to



whom the war had delivered its painful message and who had been silenced by the "My Lai accusation" aimed at all veterans.

Ron Greenwood, formerly of the 196th Light Infantry Regiment, explained what "homecoming" meant to him:

I remember the first time I got out of the hospital in San Francisco [after being wounded in Vietnam]; my dad would come over and drive me home. I remember looking at the cars going the other way on the freeway. It would be a nice sunny day. American families were going by, kids in the back seats, the parents in front. I just had this terrible feeling of animosity and disgust, this repulsiveness of what Americans were, of what the American system was. I had experienced the very immediate effects of death and war. And to most Americans it was just another Sunday drive to the zoo, regardless of what was in the news. For umpteen years the American public went along with the war with the attitude, "No artillery shells are landing in my back yard with the kids playing in the swings; so I don't give a damn." I remember being just totally aggravated about the American system. It's a kind of awareness that has shaken me pretty much for the rest of my life.

The veteran often came home from either the immediate agonies of war or at least a precarious existence in the combat zone to find home more or less the same. The contrast between war in Vietnam and a benign homefront with its blasé home-folks had a quietly withering effect on most veterans, one that continues to sustain itself even with the passage of time. The soldier-cynic either suppressed his reaction or was sent rebounding away from home and real or imagined accusations of

complicity in war crimes. Indeed, the war itself was an atrocity. "Homelessness" and defensiveness about the war, then, became a constant feature of the veteran's life, each a focus of repeatedly renewed stress.

"Stress" is very much in vogue these days and it has swallowed the veteran whole. Though there is no doubt that the variations of stress among Vietnam veterans are profound and continuing, psychologists found it a readily adaptable term to cover a wide range of emotional states. Initially, "Post-Vietnam Syndrome" defined the clinical state of the veteran's psyche. It was a term accepted by many veterans which defined their anger and frustration, but also housed anti-war attitudes among those fresh from the Vietnam combat zone. These attitudes were a mixture of anger against the brass for incompetence and self-serving ambitions, against Washington politicians who made or supported war policies, and against even the economic structure which benefited from the war, but it was also against war protestors who manifested ultra-radical sympathies but had escaped the war experience. As the anti-war movement faded at war's end, psychologists discovered "Post Traumatic Stress Disorder," attributable in some undefined sense to all Vietnam veterans. This concept implied a fundamental notion: everyone could forget the war except the veteran who remained in a state of unresolved emotional conflict. This emotional distress was noted for its "delayed" response, said psychologists anxious to promote a psychiatric solution to the problems faced by Vietnam veterans. And, in some cases—stripped of its political character—"delayed stress" does occur when a veteran manifests unexpressed feelings about the war.

Casual events might trigger the "delayed stress" syndrome. Take an extreme case: A veteran lives near a church. On Sunday parishioners routinely arrive and depart with much slamming of car doors. From inside his apartment, the repeated door slamming reverberates on a subconscious conditioned at an earlier time to an identical sound, the initial thud of a mortar round leaving its tube—a threatening anticipation of death or

The idea of "delayed stress" depoliticizes the war.

dismemberment. If the veteran is sufficiently in touch with the source of increasing anxiety, he moves to less stressful surroundings; if not (as in the case above), the pressure increases. The apprehension and anxiety arouses old fears in the daytime, renewed nightmares in sleep. Finally, the veteran snaps. The aggression that is released is either externalized in anti-social behavior or is internalized in suicide or one of its substitutes (alcohol or drug abuse). But this example does not fit most veterans, though television dramas often create and maintain such a caricature.

Post Traumatic Stress Disorder is a problematic concept, because it draws all Vietnam veterans within its sweep yet truly applies to only very few if it means sudden and unexplained stress resulting from renewed confrontation with the war experience. For many thousands of Vietnam veterans stress has not been "delayed"; rather it has *continued* from the time they left Vietnam until the present. Likewise, Vietnam-related stress need not be traumatic. On those occasions when stress leads to trauma, the delay is only in the psychiatric recognition. But an enduring, non-traumatic "stress" is the description that



San Francisco, Oct. 12, 1968.

best fits Vietnam veterans and it is akin to cynicism rather than psychological illness. Such stress as there is is drawn from the emotional despair to find a rationalization of war experiences under the impact of the My Lai accusation. Or it is focused on the desire to see the real perpetrators of the war policies punished. It represents attitudes shared by many non-veterans. It is unlikely that psychological counseling under the rubric of "delayed stress" can counter the widespread cynicism of veterans that fits the realization that they were, *in fact*, betrayed by country and commanders. The "delayed stress" notion only further isolates the veteran and therefore has the effect of a political tactic.

It is certainly small comfort to the soldier-cynic that memory of the Vietnam War is defined in clinical terms. In attempting to assist a small minority of Vietnam veterans in emotional conflict, psychologists have sought to depoliticize the war. Instead of reinforcing the significant, honest insights into the politics of the war, they have made the Vietnam veteran *en masse* into a psychiatric "case." Not only does the concept of "delayed stress" prove overly elastic, but it also serves nicely to deflect the powerful political energies of Vietnam veterans against the war. After all, Colonel Haig became General Haig and then Secretary of State Haig; junior officers of the Vietnam War became senior officers of the post-war period. If names like Rusk, McNamara, Lyndon Johnson and Nixon are gone, those that replaced them certainly traveled on the path they made. But veterans in general remained labeled as psychiatric misfits and social pariahs. All of the forces that created the Vietnam War remain in place and most veterans have not forgotten it. So the notion of stress as conceived by a few psychologists fits nicely with the dicta from former President Ford that Americans should forget the war, that it was a "mistake" not to be considered in future political deliberations. Therefore, by implication, the veterans can be forgotten. The modern concept of "delayed stress" allows the government that devised war policy to block out the social and political history of the war among veterans and those who attempt to help them.

One of the interesting side effects of the promotion of "delayed stress" has been its use by the Veterans Administration. Veterans who have appeared for screening of possible herbicide exposure in the wake of revelations about Agent Orange have been categorized as victims of "stress." During the war the military used Herbicides Orange, White and Blue as a counter-insurgency device to diminish the ambush



and evasion tactics of the Vietnamese Communists. The toxicity of the chemicals in the herbicides was ignored; no precautionary measures against contamination were taken. Beginning some five years after all American units were withdrawn from Vietnam came the realization that the tactic had boomeranged. Accounts of birth defects and cancer spread through the media. Over 10,000 Vietnam veterans have filed claims with the Veterans Administration since 1977 because of what they consider herbicide-related symptoms and ailments. Forced by Congress to address the problem, the tactics of the VA have been to downplay the problem consistently. The vast majority of veterans are too cynical even to participate in the congressionally-mandated Agent Orange Screening Examination. Because of the use of the stress concept, veterans seek to avoid the VA if they can.

Medical studies have been uncompromising in their assess-

No one should expect veterans to forget their common experience.

ment of the chemicals used as herbicides. Picloram in Agent White, 2,4-D and 2,4,5-T in Agent Orange are harmful to human health in varying degrees. Over 100 million pounds of herbicide was dropped in Vietnam and the medical problems that have resulted are serious and unending. Many of the symptoms are wide-ranging: neurological, dermatological, gastro-intestinal and psychological. All of the herbicides have either carcinogenic or teratogenic properties. These chemicals contaminated food and water supplies in Vietnam. Residues were handled in empty herbicide drums. Aerial spray often drifted considerable distances from spray sites. Heavy, long-term use around base camp perimeters meant that rear area troops were equally exposed to toxic materials. The awareness of this new hazard coming as long as 10 or more years after the veteran returned from the war zone has increased his post-Vietnam stress at the same time that the Veterans Administration and the Pentagon have attempted to limit knowledge of the problem and discount its hazards.

Just how many veterans have died of cancer, fathered defec-

tive children or remain captive to complicated and untreatable symptoms is not known. What is clear is that they bear an often invisible scar of the trauma of war—unseen mutagens which will be passed on to subsequent generations. That all of this is somehow reducible to “stress” is part of the politics of an unseen cluster of militarists in the Veterans Administration and the Department of Defense.

Probably no veterans of American wars have been so beset with problems as the Vietnam veteran. Renewed discussion of the Vietnam War, the recurring image of war in other countries seen on television, continuing and emerging health problems compounded by stress will continue to link him with his outworn military identity. Since retreat has not worked for the Vietnam veteran, some veterans have begun to gather together, usually informally, in small self-help groups. This seems a tentative step out of isolation and containment. Though veterans are scattered throughout society, transcending class and race, they have a common experience that was profoundly educational about the nature of their society. No one should expect them to forget it. A young lawyer, when asked why he wears his old military belt with his stylish three-piece suit, responded, “It gives me a sense of perspective.” □



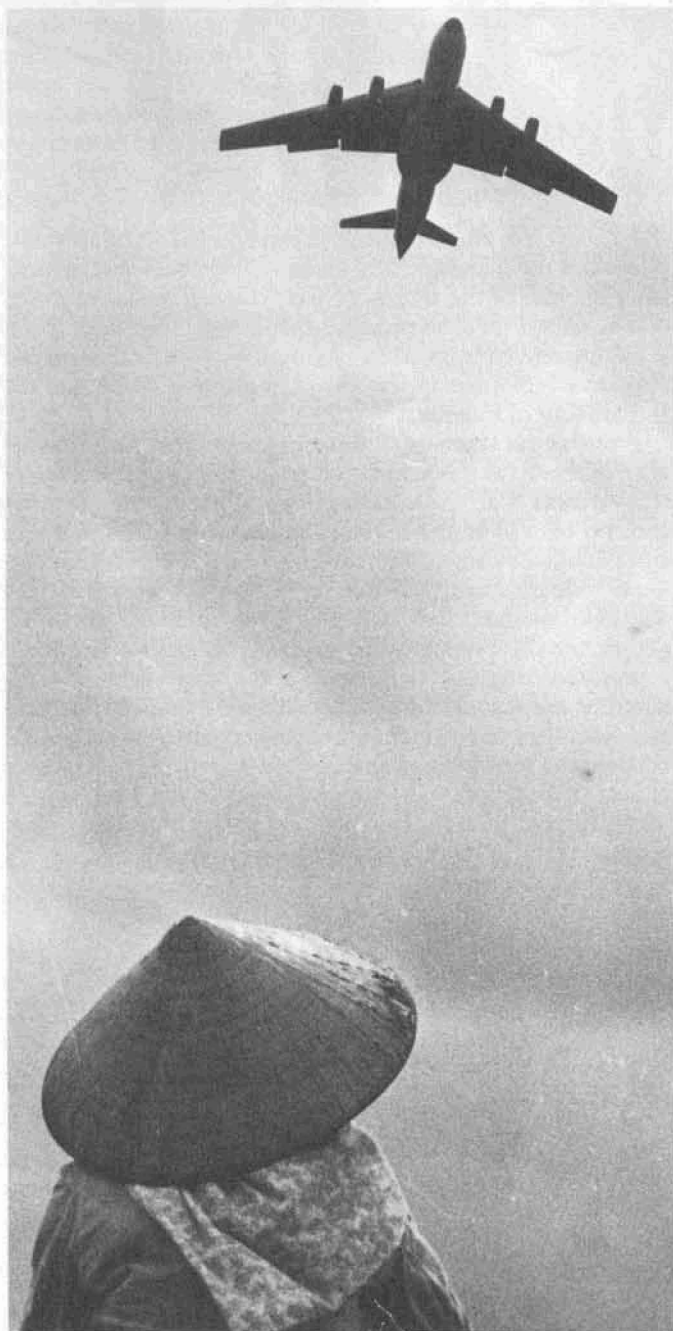
Sleeping in the field.

PLAYING POLITICS WITH THE MIAs

Both sides have used the MIA issue
as a negotiating tool.

Murray Hiebert

Alain Wastres



American POWs fly out of Hanoi.

During a brief ceremony in Hanoi in July, 1981, Vietnamese officials handed an American honor guard coffins bearing the remains of three U.S. servicemen missing since the Vietnam War. It was the first such Vietnamese gesture in three years. One of the bodies returned was that of Ronald Dodge, a Navy commander whose picture—taken while he was alive in captivity—was featured on the cover of *Life* magazine in 1967. The State Department responded to the Vietnamese gesture by confronting Hanoi with questions on how and when the three servicemen had died. Secretary of Defense Caspar Weinberger charged Vietnam with using “the bodies of men who have fallen in action . . . for diplomatic purposes.”

For the next several months, Vietnam ignored Washington's requests for discussions about Americans killed or missing in action (MIAs). Some U.S. officials began to fear Hanoi had suspended efforts to resolve the MIA problem. Then in February, 1982, Vietnam hosted a ranking American delegation, headed by Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense Richard Armitage, to discuss the issue. But when the American team arrived, Vietnamese Foreign Minister Nguyen Co Thach told foreign journalists that Washington would have to change its attitude if it wanted Vietnam's further cooperation.

“They use the MIA problem as a political means against Vietnam and so we told them no more cooperation,” Thach reportedly said. “If we continue to search for the missing, we do it as a humanitarian act for the American people. We have done our best,” Thach continued. “We did it all for free. They did not pay anything.”

Members of the U.S. team say their meetings the next day were “much less hostile,” but add that the Vietnamese clearly were upset at the American response to the return of the remains last July. “They wanted it hailed as a gesture of goodwill,” said one of the American participants. “They couldn't tolerate that the remains had not been warmly and unquestionably received.” Vietnam did, however, accept an invitation from the delegation to visit the Defense Department's forensic identification facilities in Hawaii at some future date.

In late May, Vietnam gave the names of four U.S. servicemen killed during the war to a group of nine American veterans visiting Hanoi. Vietnam's use of private Americans, rather than official channels, further demonstrated that the MIA problem is caught up in the larger tensions between Washington and Hanoi. Vietnam's secretary of the Office for Seeking

Murray Hiebert is on the staff of the Indochina Project of the Center for International Policy in Washington, D.C.

Information on Missing Persons reportedly said the remains would be handed over to the veterans group at a later date because "they are the representatives of the American people in the correct sense of the word." He charged that "successive American administrations have continued to show a hostile attitude toward Vietnam."

The failure to resolve the MIA problem seven years after the end of the war is due more to hostile relations and lingering distrust between the two governments than to the admittedly difficult task of recovering American remains. Many critics argue that the MIA issue is largely a phony problem exploited by some American politicians and some families of the missing opposed to closer ties with Vietnam and used by Hanoi as a bargaining chip to achieve improved relations with the United States.

Washington insists that Vietnam has a "humanitarian responsibility" to provide an accounting for American MIAs despite other unresolved problems and continuing hostilities between the two countries. "We view the MIA issue as a humanitarian one which should not be linked with political or economic matters," Assistant Secretary of State John Holdridge told a congressional committee last fall.

Vietnam, on the other hand, links the MIA problem to its overall relations with the United States. The Vietnamese Mission to the United Nations outlined Hanoi's position in a recent letter responding to private Americans lobbying Hanoi to be more forthcoming in returning remains: "The U.S. Government has not only failed to abide by its commitments [to provide reconstruction aid] under the Paris agreements, but also pursued a most hostile policy against Viet Nam, supported the Chinese invasion of Viet Nam and is colluding with them in an attempt to 'bleed Viet Nam.'" The letter continued, "The policy and actions of the U.S. Government in no way help the efforts of Viet Nam in the search for informations [sic] but prolong the grievances of the families of the MIAs."

Since the American prisoners of war (POWs) were released in 1973, the Defense Department has classified most of the 2,500 missing in Indochina as "presumed dead." Today the Pentagon lists only nine servicemen as MIA and one as POW, although it admits it has no evidence that any of them are still living. The 2,500 missing represent just over four percent of the 57,000 American casualties in Indochina. In contrast, the missing rate after both World War II and the Korean War was over 20 percent.

Since 1975, the remains of only 78 American servicemen have been returned from Indochina. Most experts agree that Vietnam could provide information on more of the missing, particularly about those shown by Vietnamese photographs and films released during the war to have been alive in captivity. But experts also agree that a complete accounting will never be possible because over 80 percent of the MIAs in Indochina were airmen, most of whom crashed at sea or in remote areas. "For reasons of terrain, climate, circumstances of loss, and passage of time," concluded a delegation sent to Vietnam by President Carter in 1977, "it is probable that no accounting will ever be possible for most of the Americans lost in Indochina."

The Paris Peace Agreements, signed in early 1973, committed Vietnam "to facilitate the exhumation and repatriation of [MIA] remains" and the United States to "contribute to healing the wounds of war" in Indochina. But following the defeat of the American-backed Saigon regime two years



Veterans' cemetery, Minh Hai province, Vietnam.

later, the Ford administration rejected further talks with Hanoi to discuss U.S. postwar economic aid, while demanding that Vietnam continue its search for MIA remains. In other words, the United States considered itself freed from its treaty commitments, while Vietnam was not.

In mid-1975, former Secretary of State Henry Kissinger charged Hanoi with having "flouted international agreements and flagrantly violated accepted international standards" in its final offensive against the Saigon regime. President Gerald Ford imposed a trade embargo against Vietnam and opposed its

The experts agree that a complete accounting will never be possible.

membership in the United Nations, the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund. "As long as Vietnam . . . does not give us a full and complete accounting of our missing in action," Ford said in a debate with presidential candidate Jimmy Carter in 1976, "I will never go along with admission of Vietnam to the United Nations."



Captured member of a B-52 crew is displayed to the press in Hanoi on Dec. 19, 1972.

© John Spragens, Jr.

Van Bao, Viet Nam News Agency



Pilot who escaped Vietnamese captivity.

But the administration also faced conflicting domestic pressures. The congressional Select Committee on Missing Persons in Southeast Asia, following several meetings with Vietnamese officials in Paris and Hanoi in late 1975, pressed President Ford to open talks with Vietnam on the MIA problem and lift the trade embargo as a goodwill gesture. The National League of Families, an activist lobby group representing a conservative faction of the MIA families, also urged the Ford administration to begin direct talks with Vietnam on outstanding bilateral problems such as MIAs and postwar aid.

But Secretary of State Kissinger refused, arguing that he did "not believe that American foreign policy should be shaped by . . . the remains of Americans who died in action." Later he told the Select Committee privately that the issue of an MIA accounting was an obstacle to forcing the Vietnamese to drop their demand for economic aid. "If it weren't for the MIAs, they would be driven toward us," Kissinger said. "The more anxious we are, the tougher they get." When President Ford finally agreed to open talks with Vietnam on MIAs in mid-1976, he was sharply attacked by his competitor for the Republican presidential nomination, Ronald Reagan, who charged Ford with making overtures to Hanoi to establish diplomatic relations.

In Vietnam, meanwhile, Premier Pham Van Dong publicly offered to normalize relations with the United States less than five weeks after the war ended, but he insisted on economic aid as a precondition. Hanoi desperately wanted American help to rebuild its shattered economy. Vietnam's deteriorating relations with China and its growing dependence on the Soviet Union during the last years of the war reinforced Vietnamese interest in diplomatic ties with the United States. "They need a

third country to balance the Soviets and Chinese," Kissinger told the congressional Select Committee in late 1975.

Vietnam used MIA-related gestures in an effort to improve the climate in the United States. In the last days of the war, Hanoi broadcast the names of three American pilots killed in plane crashes while on bombing missions. Washington, however, waited over two months to contact the Vietnamese about the return of the bodies. Another two months passed before Vietnam agreed to repatriate the remains. Two days after Hanoi announced that agreement the United States vetoed Vietnam's membership in the United Nations. Hanoi promptly withdrew its offer, charging Washington with not having demonstrated similar goodwill. Finally in late 1975, Vietnam returned the bodies, not through Administration channels, but to the Select Committee.

Vietnamese Ambassador Vo Van Sung told the committee in Paris in December that the MIA problem could be resolved only through negotiations between the two sides. Hanoi, he said, would face a "problem of public opinion" if it made too many concessions on MIAs without a U.S. willingness to help "heal the wounds of war." "Imagine what the Vietnamese people feel," Sung said, "when they look around and see bridges and homes destroyed and see the cemeteries and wonder why the U.S. does not do something."

During the 1976 presidential election campaign, Jimmy Carter sharply criticized the Ford administration for refusing to negotiate with Vietnam on MIAs. In early 1977, the new president sent a ranking commission to Hanoi headed by former labor union leader, Leonard Woodcock. Following several days of talks with Vietnamese officials, the commission reported that Hanoi had restated its willingness to cooperate in accounting for Americans MIAs, but had also stressed that the issues of aid and normalization were "inter-related." The Woodcock team concluded that "normalization of relations affords the best prospect for obtaining a fuller accounting for our missing personnel" and recommended "technical advice and assistance on defusing unexploded ordnance."

Carter responded with several conciliatory gestures toward Vietnam. He dropped U.S. opposition to Vietnam's U.N. membership, agreed to hold talks on normalization, and promised to lift the trade embargo after embassies had been exchanged. Vietnam reciprocated by returning 11 MIA remains in March and 21 in September 1977. Three rounds of talks were held in Paris during the year, but negotiations floundered on the question of U.S. economic assistance to Vietnam. Hanoi insisted on aid as a precondition for diplomatic relations, while in the United States Congress had voted to block assistance to Vietnam.

Vietnam has used MIA remains to make goodwill gestures.

In July 1978 Hanoi announced that it had dropped economic aid as a precondition for normalizing relations with Washington. Four more MIA remains were returned in August in anticipation of another round of talks. Vietnamese officials later told visitors that they thought improved relations between the United States and Vietnam would have helped head off a growing crisis between Vietnam, China, and the pro-Chinese Pol Pot regime in Kampuchea. Finally in November, the

United States acknowledged Hanoi's change of policy on aid, but by then Vietnam had signed a friendship treaty with the Soviet Union, formalized plans to topple the Pol Pot regime, and faced an imminent military attack from China.

Washington's foreign policy focus had also shifted—toward normalizing relations with China. The new policy was a victory for National Security Advisor Zbigniew Brzezinski, who had long advocated developing international alliances to isolate and weaken the Soviet Union and its allies. Following Vietnam's invasion of Cambodia in late 1978, the United States informed Hanoi that normalization talks had been postponed indefinitely. Occasional low-level discussions continued between the United States and Vietnam on MIAs, but Hanoi did not return any more remains for the next three years.

Meanwhile, the MIA issue gained increased domestic importance in the United States. The massive flight of "boat people" beginning in late 1978 resulted in a sharp increase in reports from refugees claiming to have seen live American prisoners. Some 400 such reports coupled with the return in 1979 of Robert Garwood, an American Marine captured in 1965, convinced many MIA families that Hanoi was still holding American prisoners. However, the director of the Defense Intelligence Agency told a congressional committee in 1981 that "we still cannot prove that there are live Americans being detained against their will in Indochina."

The hopes of the MIA families were further bolstered in 1980 when a former Hanoi mortician, now a refugee in the United



Captured U.S. pilot.

States, reported that Vietnam had collected the remains of over 400 American servicemen, planning to turn them over to the United States after normalization. The Pentagon regards this source as credible, although some administration officials believe his numbers should be divided by "about ten."

Armed with refugee live-sighting stories, Garwood's return, and the mortician's report, the League of Families began a massive publicity campaign in the media and lobbying effort in Congress sharply attacking President Carter's handling of the MIA issue. "Carter allowed his administration to systematically

"Reagan is not only interested, but he's briefed."

slough it [the MIA problem] off in favor of trying to get normalized relations with Vietnam," charged Congressman Robert Dornan, a close ally of the League.

Carter responded to this domestic pressure by establishing an Interagency Group to work on MIA matters and stepping up U.S. intelligence-gathering operations to verify the refugee reports. But he did not return to high-level negotiations with Vietnam, although this had proven to be his most effective tactic in getting information from Hanoi on MIAs. Accounting for the missing became a secondary concern when the United States began cooperating with China and the Association of Southeast Asian Nations to isolate Vietnam economically and diplomatically to force its military withdrawal from Cambodia.

The election of Ronald Reagan in late 1980 brought increased hope to the American MIA lobby. As governor of California, Reagan had worn a POW bracelet, and later as a radio broadcaster he had devoted several programs to MIAs. "The President is not only interested, but he's briefed," says Ann Griffiths, executive director of the League of Families. Griffiths cites the reported U.S.-backed clandestine operations into Laos in May and November 1981 to determine whether American prisoners are still being held in Indochina as grounds for the League's "cautious optimism" about the priority the Reagan administration puts on MIAs.

But beyond the alleged Laos operations, Reagan for the most part has followed the policies on MIAs and Vietnam pursued during the last half of the Carter administration. Last year, the State Department stepped up pressure on Vietnam by attempting to block economic aid from private American relief agencies and U.N. organizations. Assistant Secretary Holdridge told a congressional committee that U.S. "normalization of relations with Vietnam is out of the question as long as Hanoi continues to occupy Kampuchea and generally remains a menace to other countries in the region."

Meanwhile, American officials repeatedly call on Hanoi to resolve the MIA problem on purely humanitarian grounds. After Vietnam returned the bodies of three pilots in July 1981 as a gesture to the Reagan administration, U.S. officials sharply criticized Hanoi for holding back information for political purposes. When the Armitage delegation visited Vietnam early in 1982, the American officials talked only about MIAs while

refusing to discuss any of Hanoi's concerns about U.S. policies.

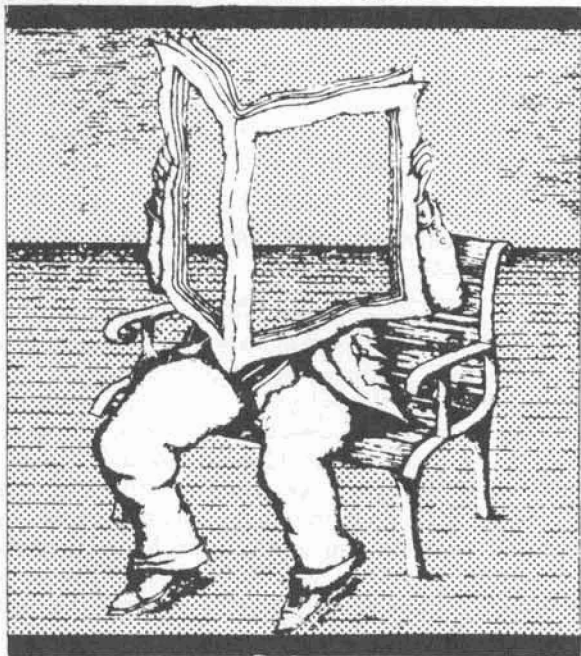
During the past four years, Vietnam has appeared to respond to the American pressure, isolation and unilateral demands by relegating resolution of the MIA problem to back-burner status. Occasionally Hanoi continues to signal its interest in improving relations with the United States by returning the remains of American servicemen or by meeting with representatives of the Pentagon's Joint Casualty Resolution Center to discuss the problem of the missing. But Vietnamese officials told the

Washington would have to change its attitude if it wanted Vietnam's further cooperation.

Armitage delegation that further cooperation would be abandoned if the Reagan administration uses the MIA issue as "weapon" against Vietnam.

When Hanoi gave the names of four U.S. pilots to a visiting group of American veterans in May 1982, Vietnam was inviting Washington to inquire about the return of their bodies and once again signalling the Reagan Administration that the MIA problem will be resolved only through diplomatic cooperation. Hanoi's handling of the MIA issue during the past seven years suggests that the Vietnamese will resist U.S. demands to give complete accounting for the American missing as long as Washington continues its hostile policies toward Vietnam. □

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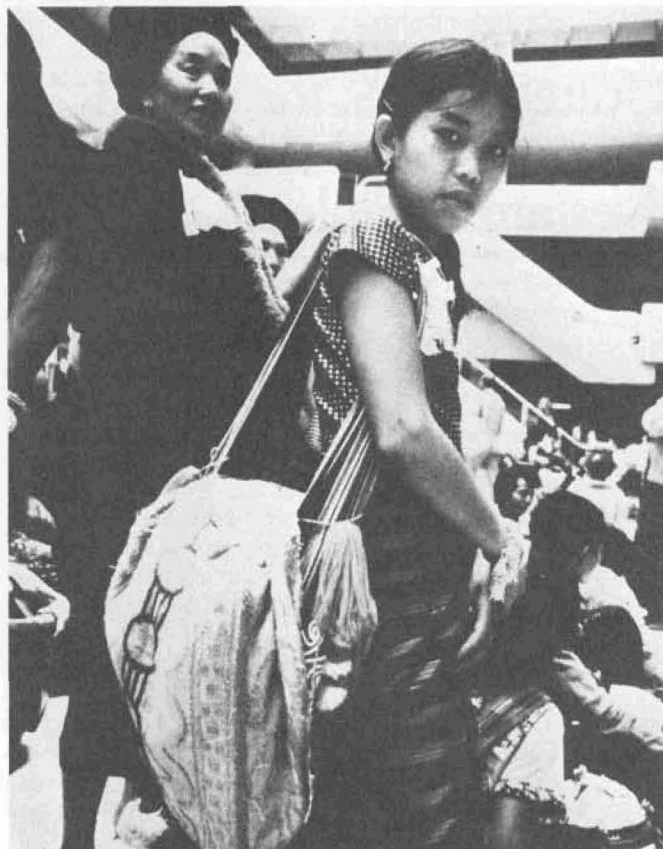
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INDOCHINESE IN THE UNITED STATES

Over half a million Indochinese live in the United States today. Sixty-seven percent of them are Vietnamese, twenty-three percent are Laotian, and ten percent are Kampuchean. Within these groupings there are Chinese-Vietnamese, Lowland Lao, Hmong, Mien, and other minorities. Some speak English easily, worked with the Americans in their own countries, and have quickly found places for themselves here. Others had never traveled more than a dozen miles from their birthplaces, never learned to read, and knew all there was to know about the soil they tilled and the crops they grew. Some of them may never find a comfortable place. Some have moved into flourishing Indochinese communities in warm-weather cities like Los Angeles, San Diego, and San Jose. Others are scattered in the harsh climates and small towns of Vermont, Wyoming, and South Dakota, the first foreigners their new communities have known. Some are very rich, others are very powerful and ruthlessly exploit their compatriots, and many are ordinary people. Some left their countries because of "push factors"—fears that they would pay with their lives for their past activities. Others left because of the "pull factors"—visions of a better life in the richest nation in the world.

Until mid-1982, U.S. immigration policy treated all the Indochinese emigrants as refugees fleeing from political persecution, allowing them to enter the United States in numbers far exceeding normal immigration quotas. This policy encouraged departures from the countries of Indochina and allowed succeeding American administrations to point at the masses of people "voting with their feet" against "communism" as evidence that the socialist governments in Indochina had made life unbearable for their citizens. The welcome extended to Indochinese stood in stark contrast to the treatment accorded to Haitians, who have been classified as economic refugees and confined in detention centers or towed out to sea. New guidelines went into effect on May 1, 1982 which required Indochinese to prove close ties to the United States in order to qualify for admission as refugees. U.S. Immigration and Naturalization Service official Joe Sureck told a Reuters reporter in Hong Kong, "It is now appropriate to make the distinction between genuine and economic refugees."

The flow of refugees out of Indochina has peaked twice. The first wave of 200,000 came as socialist forces defeated pro-U.S. regimes in 1975. By contrast, a mere trickle of people departed in 1976 and 1977. In 1978 a second wave began, which crested at 270,000 in 1979. By 1981, there were fewer than 100,000 departures. Today, all outward flow predictions are downward. Laotians arriving in Thailand, for example, dropped from a monthly average of 1,700 in 1981 to about 700 per month in the first quarter of 1982.



Lao hill tribe refugees at the Bangkok airport.

Each outward wave from Indochina produced a later inward wave into the United States. In 1975, the United States admitted 180,000 refugees, almost exclusively Vietnamese. They tended to be educated, skilled, and previously connected to the U.S. presence in Vietnam. By 1977, the yearly flow had diminished to less than 2,000. The United States reopened its doors to refugees in 1979, admitting 200,000 Indochinese between mid-1979 and mid-1981. Laotians predominated among those admitted in 1980 and Kampucheans in 1981. The second wave of refugees was generally less educated, less skilled, and less able to cope on their own in a highly technological society than the first wave had been. The later arrivals were more likely than the earlier ones to have come for economic reasons, although some groups—such as Chinese-Vietnamese—had been targeted for harassment by their governments.

The articles which follow do not attempt to report on all the Indochinese now in the United States. Instead, they focus on specific aspects of the ways some Indochinese are living in their new environment. By so doing, we hope to illuminate the variety of the people who have come and of the issues which their coming raises. □

LAO-AMERICANS: A NEW CONSTITUENCY

Laotians came to the United States for varied reasons—and their new lives are complex.

Jacqui Chagnon and Roger Rumpf

If your country hadn't come to my country, I wouldn't be here today," says a Laotian resident of Meriden, Connecticut. Before 1975, the town of 55,000 included only one Asian family, the owners of a Chinese restaurant. Today, there are seven Lao families, four Vietnamese families, and one Chinese-Vietnamese family. Over 131,000 Laotians—four percent of the pre-1975 population of Laos—live in the United States. Most have come since 1979, "pushed" and "pulled" by the consequences of U.S. involvement in Indochina and by post-war political and economic strains common after decades of warfare.

According to Laotians in Thai refugee camps and inside Laos, the prime political "push" stems from the lack of a codified system of justice and the possibility of arbitrary arrest. Those formerly employed by the United States-supported Royal Lao Government (RLG) express particular apprehensions about being sent to "seminar," the Lao People's Democratic Republic's (LPDR) parallel to Vietnam's re-education camps. (These should not be confused with "village seminars" which are more like town meetings—albeit compulsory—held once or twice a month and which also draw criticism.)

Tensions and insecurities fomented by resistance groups based mostly in Thailand create another kind of political push. "The fighting [between the resistance and LPDR forces] became so bad," said Mrs. Phaithung, formerly of the southern province of Champassak, "we decided to leave Laos and go to the camp." Lowland Lao resistance groups also recruit the young from Laos into their safe havens in the Thai refugee camps.

Members of defeated resistance groups feel a special push to leave the country. The Hmong followers of Vang Pao, former leader of the CIA's Special Guerrilla Forces, have been the most conspicuous of such groups. Vang Pao himself fled Laos in 1975 with about 40,000 of his troops and their families. (See chart A.)

Another set of pushes for Laotian refugees was economic. Most important among these were the disruptions caused by the war and its aftermath. Two decades of U.S. presence distorted Laos' fragile subsistence agricultural economy, particularly in the Mekong River border towns. Until 1975, the United States and its allies supplied up to 90 percent of the old RLG's revenues. When the lucrative "American era" ended, former U.S. employees, RLG civil servants, soldiers, and policemen lost their jobs or suffered drastic cuts in their incomes. A former U.S. Embassy chauffeur who used to make \$50 a week now says he is lucky to make that in a month. For some Laotians this plummet was too difficult and so they left.



Jacqui Chagnon and Roger Rumpf worked from 1978-81 for the American Friends Service Committee as field directors of the Indochina program. From their base in Vientiane, Laos, they traveled regularly to many parts of Laos, as well as Vietnam and Kampuchea. They frequently visited refugee camps in Thailand. During a recent nine-month lecture tour, they met with Laotian refugees in over 60 U.S. and Canadian communities. They are now staff members of the Southeast Asia Resource Center (East) and live in Washington, D.C.

Not all the economic pressures pushing emigrants to leave are due to the war. In 1978-79, forced cooperative practices coupled with a misunderstood rice tax embittered southern Lao farmers. In protest, many went into nearby refugee camps in Thailand. Some economic disruption resulted from the 1977 drought and 1978 flood. "Never before in my life," explained farmer Thom, "have we ever had two consecutive years of natural disasters." Food scarcity was exacerbated by the lack of warehouse reserves, delays in international deliveries and poor internal distribution. In the past such economic woes were relieved by a natural migration to northeastern Thailand—just across the Mekong—where over 10 million relatives of the Lowland Lao live. Somboun, born in Thailand and now a Lao citizen, has moved back and forth across the Mekong River border four times. Each move was precipitated by economics. Since 1975, though, the Mekong River has been a guarded border. The Thai government places those who cross without visas into refugee camps.

Such economic and political "pushes" are common to many refugee movements. At the same time Laotians were fleeing their country in 1978, for example, 200,000 Burmese Moslems fearing religious persecution took refuge in the eastern mountains of Bangla Desh. International relief agencies supported the refugees in holding camps while the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) negotiated a voluntary repatriation agreement ensuring the Moslems' security and human rights within Burma. By the end of 1979, all but 13,000 of the Burmese Moslems had voluntarily returned to Burma under the UNHCR's protection. In contrast to this typical pattern, international agencies and foreign governments offered Laotian refugees settlement in some of the richest countries in the world instead of voluntary repatriation to one of the poorest. Obviously, this open-door immigration policy became the paramount "pull" between 1978 and 1981. (See chart A.)

Two decades of U.S. presence distorted Laos' subsistence economy.

By the time we arrived in Laos in mid-1978, Laotians were already talking about going to the refugee camps so they could "go to America." The message that the United States had quadrupled its Indochinese refugee quota traveled fast. (See chart B.) Twice a day the Voice of America broadcast in Lao provides world news including interviews with refugees resettled in the United States. In one Lao broadcast we heard a former Vientiane barber tell how he was learning English and making \$5.00 an hour doing the same work. That sounds very attractive in a country where \$5.00 a day is very high pay. One evening a Lao friend came to our house quite upset that he would never see his brother again. "My brother just left for the Nong Khai refugee camp," he explained, "because he thinks he will be able to go to America. He heard about the resettlement of refugees on Voice of America."

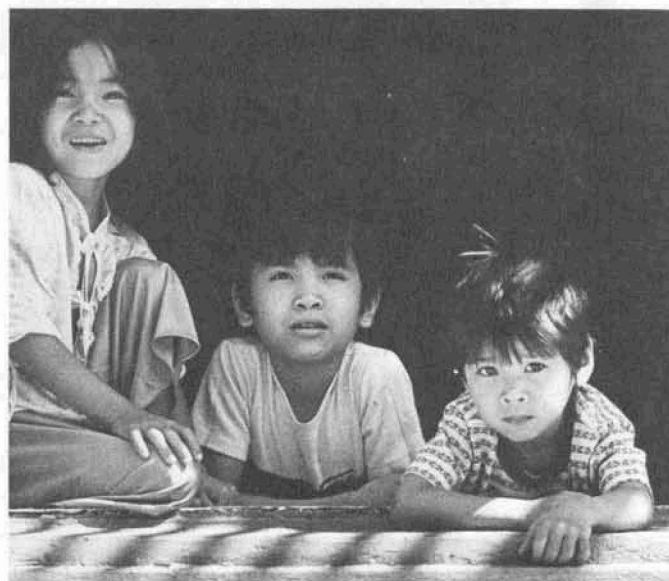
Starting in 1981 both the "pushes" and the "pulls" began to change, gradually affecting the flow of refugees out of Laos. (See chart A.) Inside Laos, the government slowed down the cooperative movement, relaxed tax regulations and began to release "seminar" detainees. Food production improved, reaching basic self-sufficiency in most of the country. And in general the LPDR took a more moderate approach to its socialist transformation. Around the same time, the United States reduced its Laotian refugee intake from 59,000 in 1980 to 20,000 in 1981.

If the current 1982 rate holds, about 12,000 Laotians will come to the United States. (See chart B.) Meanwhile the Thai government eliminated the option of third country resettlement for all Laotians arriving in Thailand after January 1981. Furthermore it segregated people who had arrived after 1980 and placed them in starker conditions than those who had arrived earlier. The UNHCR and Thai and Lao authorities established a legal voluntary repatriation program in 1980. By mid-1982 about 1,000 lowland Lao and Hmong had returned home under its auspices. Meanwhile, an informal and little noticed repatriation had already been under way between 1975 and 1981. Perhaps as many as 10,000 Laotians quietly and without authorization returned home.¹

Voluntary repatriation is gradually gaining momentum for yet another reason: despite strong desires to reunite their families, resettled refugees in the United States and elsewhere are hesitant to encourage relatives to join them. "I think my people who did not fight with the CIA and who are still in the Thai refugee camps should all go back to Laos," a Hmong community leader emphasized. "Here in America things are very strange for the Hmong, and in Thailand they don't want us. If the Lao [government] will accept them, their only choice is to return to Laos."

Generally Laotian refugees in the United States were not quite so frank. More often we heard ambivalent comments: a young English-speaking father of three whose relatives wait in a refugee camp insisted, "I want to help them but I can't sponsor them. How do I explain to them that \$500 a month in the United States is not equal to \$500 in Laos?"

"No," said 40-year-old Kham, "I will not ask my wife and children to join me. They should stay in Savannakhet [Laos]. It's too different here." As if to explain, he stared at the TV across the living room where the "Incredible Hulk" hypnotized five Lao refugee children. Kham repeated, "I don't want my children here. I've heard that some refugees are going back to Laos," he continued. "Is this true? Will I be killed if I go back?" As we left, Kham asked us not to tell his sponsors he wants to go back home. "They may think I'm ungrateful." Kham's sponsors say he is "a model refugee." He tries very hard to learn English.



Kampuchean children in San Francisco.

Pat Goodwin

The former elementary school teacher has a stable job as a meat cutter. "I used to mold brains, now I cut them out," he commented with a smile. Even though he now earns in one month what he used to earn in a year, Kham insists he won't be happy until he is reunited in Laos with his family.

Kham's desire to return home is not unusual. During the first half of 1982, we met with Laotian refugees, their sponsors, and voluntary agency personnel in over 60 U.S. and Canadian communities. One of the recurring questions we heard from Laotian refugees was whether it is feasible for them to return home, either for a visit or to stay. An extensive Illinois survey found that 77 percent of the refugees polled listed the fragmentation of families as a "very serious" problem, while service agencies listed it as a low concern. According to David Haines

"I don't want my children here."

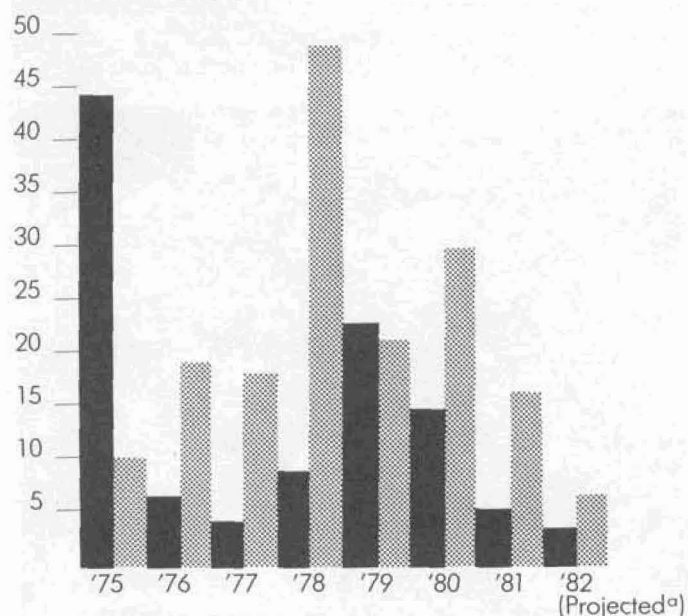
of the Office of Refugee Resettlement, Department of Health and Human Services, "It is the single area where the view of refugees and those of service providers differ."²

The lack of information—and sometimes misinformation—about home adds to the anxieties which arise from the separation of families. Much of the refugees' knowledge about Laos is three years out of date. Many of the refugees we talked to, for example, had not heard that the Lao government has released hundreds of former high-level officials from "seminar" camps since December 1980. Few refugees or agencies know that the United States maintains an embassy in Vientiane or that the LPDR has one in Washington. Such information is vital for refugees hoping to bring family members to the United States or to obtain visas to visit Laos.

CHART A

Lowland Lao & Highland Lao Arrivals into Thai Refugee Camps

ARRIVALS (thousands)



Lowland Lao (Ethnic Lao & Thai Dam)

^aProjections based on Jan.-Apr., 1982 figures

Recently arrived refugees express apprehension about their futures in the context of U.S. unemployment and Reagan's cuts in federal refugee assistance. "We want to work, not to *kin* (eat) welfare," claimed a Laotian social worker in Minneapolis. "But first we must learn English and get job training. Especially now with high unemployment, we need this," he stressed. He expects suicide rates among the refugees to go up, "particularly among the older people who may feel they are a burden here. Some of my people talk about being in a prison. With death their spirits will be free to go back home to the mountains of Laos."

Another Hmong who fought for the CIA's secret guerrilla army told us that many Hmong refugees are angry. "We were American soldiers. For 15 years my people fought and many died," he said. "In the refugee camps, we were promised that in the United States we would receive 36 months of assistance. On May 1 (1982), Mr. Reagan will cut this to 18 months."

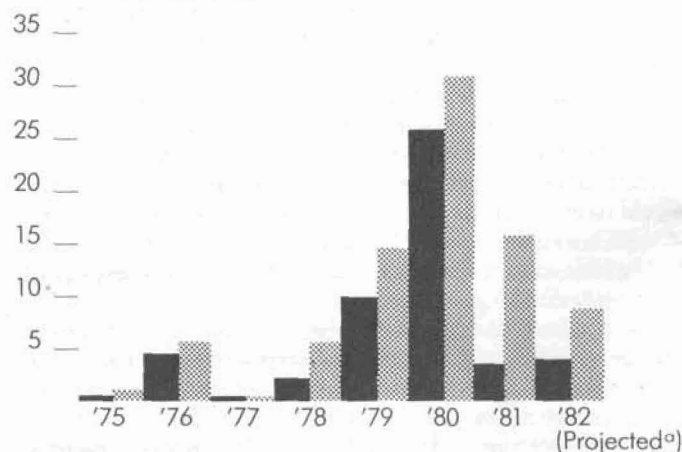
Keith Putnam, an administrator at the Oregon Department of Human Resources offered some frank advice to Laotian refugees. "I am sorry to say that for many of you, the best advice I can give you is to move to another state," Putnam wrote in his letter informing the refugees of the cut in federal funds. Many Laotians were forced to move up to a dozen times during the war in their homeland. Our discussions with refugees and people who work with them convinced us that many Laotians are moving from state to state without investigating the real situations behind rumors of better opportunities "elsewhere." This kind of casual migration continues a traditional pattern evolved in Laos, where empty land is plentiful, and most people are peasants, but it is unlikely to make adjustment to life in the United States easier. There are reports that Laotians are working as migrant farm laborers in Florida and Texas.

At the same time that funds for refugee assistance have been dwindling and unemployment has been rising, an increasing proportion of newly arriving refugees lacks proficiency in English and has few appropriate job skills. (See chart C.) As a

CHART B

Lowland Lao & Highland Lao Resettlement in United States

ARRIVALS (thousands)



Highland Lao (Hmong, Mien, Tin, Lahu)

Source: United Nations High Commissioner on Refugees



Learning English.

result, more and more refugees are relying on community groups for English and skills training, and a healthy inter-cultural exchange is developing between refugees and American support communities. Both sides are learning as Laotians study American ways and Americans investigate the culture and history of Indochina. While sponsors were asking us to explain why Laotians had come to the United States, the refugees pressed us to explain the history of the Lao war to Americans. "Tell them we are not Vietnamese," joked Mr. Sali.

In almost all communities we visited, Laotian refugees have formed associations according to ethnic group: Lowland Lao, Hmong, Thai Dam and Mien. Until recently, old rightists such as General Vang Pao and Sisouk Na Champassak dominated such Laotian groups and used them to gain support for resistance movements against the LPDR operating from Thai and southern Chinese bases. Throughout the United States and Canada, refugees spoke of "special monthly collections" by certain associations affiliated with resistance groups. One veteran of the resistance, now unemployed in the United States and critical of the tithe, questions where the money really goes. "They could be using it for beer and cigarettes," he commented. Privately, local social workers often express dismay about resistance groups seeking support from refugees rather than focusing on resettlement needs. "It's amazing how Vang Pao can come in here and whip these people into a sudden frenzy," a five-year veteran refugee worker noted. "Lately, though, his ideas are not taking hold. There seems to be some discontent [with him] and concern about jobs and food."

Alternative local refugee associations, often with younger and more moderate leaders, are challenging rightists' preoccupation with the Laotian resistance. Near the Los Angeles suburb where Vang Pao headquarters his nationwide Lao (Hmong) Family Community Association, well-endowed with federal funds for social services, are several other Hmong and Lowland Lao associations with different perspectives. "Too many of my people have died already," commented a Hmong man, "and to continue the war is futile. It's time to build a new life, *here* in America," he insisted. "We may have many things to learn and it's not so easy." Another nonaligned Hmong said that U.S. military recruiters come to their association office to "get Hmong to join. But my people aren't interested in being American soldiers again."

In a discussion about the similarities between the wars in El Salvador and in Laos, a former Lao army sergeant trained in Texas asked, "Why do big nations always want to fight their wars in small countries?"

Resettlement has not ended the Laotians' concern for events in their homeland. Virtually every one of the 131,000 Laotians now living in the Lincolns, Portlands, and Hartfords of the United States has left relatives and friends behind. They will need communication with, information about, and visits to home if they are to overcome the deep anxieties arising from their separation. But this kind of access to their homeland depends on the state of diplomatic relations between the

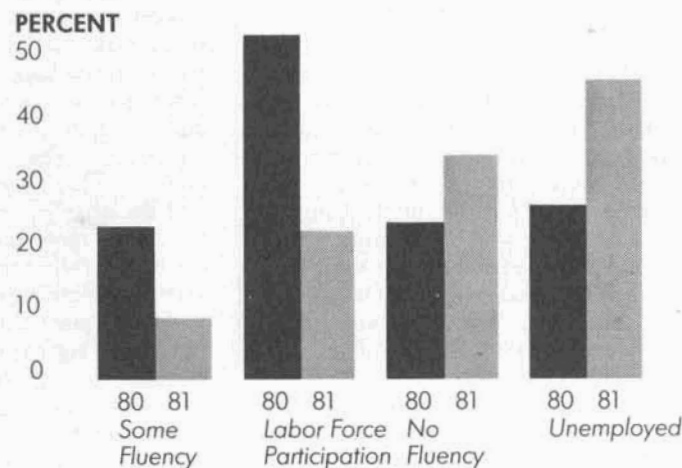
Resettlement has not ended Laotians' concern for events in their homeland.

United States and Laos, and relations with Laos are deeply influenced by U.S. relations with Indochina as a whole. Laotians and other Indochinese refugees thus form a new and persuasive constituency which is concerned about U.S. relations with Indochina. In addition, tens of thousands of Americans who have sponsored and befriended refugees now take a serious interest in matters which mean so much to their friends. While there is no guarantee that this constituency will support one or another particular position, it is clear that its members will have more and easier contact with their homeland if U.S. relations with Indochina improve. And this, in turn, will dispel the misinformation which encourages ideological hostility. □

Notes:

1. This estimate is based upon our own personal interviews with Laotians who repatriated on their own, upon Lao government statistics, and discussions with UNHCR officials in Laos.
2. David W. Haines, "Southeast Asian Refugees in the United States: An Overview Based on the Existing Research," Paper presented at the April 2, 1982, meeting of the Association of Asian Studies, Chicago, Illinois.

CHART C % of English fluency correlated to employment of the 1980 & 1981 Indochinese refugees by year of entry



Based on David Haines' paper, see footnote #2

LEARNING FROM THE LAO

David Riley

The Lao have much to offer their new Vermont friends.

Pat Goudvis



Damdouane sat on her haunches on a faded green and blue rug next to a worn beige couch, the only piece of furniture in the room. She punched buttons on a portable tape recorder. Laotian flute-like music came on, and she began to sing a folksong written by her uncle:

Don't all you Lao here remember . . .
the chickens, the ducks, the water
buffalo . . .

Never forget the fires burning,
the children who have died,
the uncles and relatives left there.

Damdouane's body was still, her hands in her lap, her eyes now closed, now looking into the distance. She wore a blue-green print dress, horn-rimmed glasses, and pink curlers in her uncovered hair. Her high-pitched singing was a haunting wail of pulsating sounds that finally failed to hide her sobs. Suddenly she stopped, with a half laugh, half sigh, and said, "That's enough." She wiped her eyes with the back of her hand and was smiling again.

Damdouane, 37, is a perky woman in

spite of having had three operations in the two years she has been in the United States, one for astigmatism, a hysterectomy, and another to remove gall stones. "Her stones were so large," the doctor said, "that if she had waited another day before coming in, she would have been dead. I don't know how she stood the pain."

To Damdouane the pain was part of life; she simply bore it, as she bears the pain of leaving in Laos her only child, an 18-year-old daughter, to care for her mother. "Some mornings," she says, "I miss my family so much that I just sit and cry for them." But Damdouane doesn't complain. She is so happy and full of energy even when she isn't feeling well that, as Karen Blanchard, an American friend, says, "She makes you feel like you've been sad all your life."

"I consider the Lao as a resource for a different way of looking at things," says Connie Waterberry, who spent four years working with refugees in Laos and Thailand and now works with refugees for the state of Vermont. "They have a real wisdom about life and children that we are missing. They have a sense of specialness about children that's beyond love. Sometimes some of the women will call and ask if Nathan couldn't come over for a few hours, just so they can be with him."

Nathan is the two-and-a-half-year-old son of Connie and Carl Hirth, who also worked in Laos. He has had some developmental problems, and Connie has been struck by the different attitudes of their American and Laotian friends toward him. "The American attitude is, 'Poor Connie and Carl. Look at all the hard work they've got ahead of them.' But with the Lao, there is none of that. There's no self-pity, no sense of anger or guilt or anguish, no looking at why it happened. They simply say, 'That's Nathan. That's the way life is. Accept it and do what you can.' It allows you to be a little more satisfied with what you get in life, rather than feel you should be getting something more or different."

At the same time, Connie and Carl have been getting medical treatment for Nathan, a step that Connie feels the Lao, with their emphasis on acceptance, would not be inclined to take. Being around the Lao, says Connie, "allows us to have the best of both worlds," the

acceptance and calmness of Buddhism and the initiative of the problem-solving western approach.

Americans working with Laotian refugees are amazed at the kindness that prevails among siblings. Constance St. John took a Lao family of five on a six-hour car ride to get citizenship papers. With five children and nine grandchildren of her own, she knows something about family dynamics. "Not one time was there a fight or a squabble," she reported. "The older children always referred to the youngest as 'my baby.'" Another time she watched the oldest child come home with a bottle of Coke. "He was barely inside the door when he told the other two to go get a cup so he could give them some," she said.

Americans working with Laotians have also come to appreciate their pervasive love of fun. "Adults aren't afraid to laugh, giggle, have fun, and be child-like, both at work and at play," observes Karen Blanchard. "They work hard and they play hard, and they don't put as much separation between the two as we do." In one barely decorated Laotian apartment, a hand-written note is tacked on the wall: "If you laugh first, I will laugh after."

For the Americans who work with the refugees, the learning is not only about other cultures but also about their own.

"They work hard and they play hard, and they don't put as much separation between the two as we do."

They make comparisons, about the amount of space they need, for example, compared to the small spaces that many refugees are comfortable in. Or about attitudes toward possessions. "They aren't so damn thing-conscious!" exclaims one woman working with a Quaker group sponsoring a Laotian family. Constance St. John, also an active member of a sponsoring group, feels she has learned a lesson in international as well as domestic politics. Seeing how much work it takes to help refugees from another culture to find their way in ours "makes one recognize ever more clearly" the importance of preventing "such desperate problems as refugees present from occurring in the first place." □

David Riley works with Lao refugees in Putney, Vermont.

REIGN OF TERROR

Alex West

Former Saigon military and police officers intimidate Vietnamese in the United States.

- * Duong Trong Lam was shot to death on a San Francisco street in July, 1981. A communique mailed from Las Vegas took responsibility for the murder in the name of the Anti-Communist Viets' Organization (ACVO).
- * Dr. Ngo Vinh Long was attacked with a Molotov cocktail after appearing on an academic panel at Harvard University. His assailant claimed temporary insanity bred out of his belief that Long was a traitor to his country.
- * A Vietnamese woman who returned home for a visit in 1981 closed her small business in California for fear that right-wing thugs would identify her as pro-communist and vandalize her shop.
- * Two Vietnamese men walked into a San Jose restaurant in January, 1982 and began shooting at a party of eight people. One man was killed, another paralyzed. Sources in the community told the *San Jose Mercury News* (June 20, 1982) that the murder was part of a war between two gangs.
- * Groups of Vietnamese refugees are frequently invited to meetings where they hear about a band of guerrillas who have returned to their country to "fight communists." Then they are asked to contribute to the cause.

© John Spragens, Jr.



Anti-communist Vietnamese demonstrate against Vietnam's Ambassador to the United Nations, Ha Van Lau, Berkeley, July 1980.

Alex West is an associate researcher at SRC, with a background in Vietnamese studies.

Well-organized gangs headed by former Saigon military and police officers are using extortion and violence to dominate the Vietnamese community. As many as 50,000 ARVN and police personnel came to the United States in 1975 under immigration guidelines which gave (and still give) high priority to people who had worked closely with the U.S. forces in Vietnam. They have found easy victims among the large number of Vietnamese arriving in the United States since 1979.

In Southern California, which has one of the largest Vietnamese populations in the country, police departments have been studying the problem of violence for nearly two years. According to a Los Angeles police report, the most powerful gang—known as the Frogmen because its leaders were members of a Vietnamese Navy underwater demolition team—has 200 members and is engaged in "murder, gambling, prostitution, drugs, extortion, and robberies."

"We're not talking about a bunch of street punks who have formed gangs," Monterey Park police officer Gary Palmer—a former Marine interrogator who speaks Vietnamese—told the *San Jose Mercury News*. "The leaders of the Vietnamese gangs are people in their 30s and 40s who went into the military when they were teen-agers. They're the guys who floated up rivers into North Vietnam to assassinate people. To blow away a guy is nothing to them. Killing and suffering are nothing to them. They have a total disregard for prescribed ethics. Their attitude is, 'If you're my enemy, I've got to kill you before you kill me.'"

Sgt. Bud Olea of the Los Angeles Police Department corroborated Palmer's assessment in a telephone interview; "Many high-ranking ARVN and Saigon police personnel are involved in extortion and are intimidating newly arrived refugees, who still fear them from their previous positions in Vietnam." Thus far, the gangs have operated strictly within the Vietnamese community. Refugees, especially newcomers, are often unwilling to cooperate with American police, for fear gang members will retaliate against them. Los Angeles police say some interpreters are afraid to let suspects see their faces. Potential informers are even more frightened.

Vietnamese restaurant owners and shop keepers in Southern California complain of protection rackets in which gang representatives extort monthly payments ranging from \$25 to \$1,200. Anthony Crittendon, an investigator for the California Department of Justice's Bureau of Organized Crime and Criminal Intelligence told the *San Jose Mercury News* that Vietnamese businesses all over California are being extorted, sometimes by more than one group. "Store owners are beginning to arm themselves to protect themselves against gang members, which is creating an increased potential for violence," he said. Vietnamese sources and police believe several California murders have been punishments for resistance to extortion attempts.

Police records focus primarily on the ordinary criminal activities of the gangs, but they may be involved in political intimidation as well. Detective Sam Masuda of the Los Angeles Police Department's Asian Task Force commented, "Criminal activity seems to be structured, like a pyramid. Extortion exists at the lower levels, but there may be

some political motive at the top." He added, "Money extorted from small businesses may go toward financing political operations."

During the past year, the Vietnamese-language press in the United States has given prominent coverage to the activities of an anti-communist guerrilla force headed by former Admiral Hoang Co Minh, allegedly fighting in Vietnam to overthrow the communist government. A support group calling itself the National Movement to Support Resistances for the Liberation of Vietnam has collected money from homesick refugees throughout the United States to support this force. Ngoc Nguyen, editor of a weekly magazine published in Santa Clara county for refugees, wrote an article questioning whether the money really goes to the guerrillas or stays in the pockets of those who collect it. He told the *Peninsula Times Tribune* (June 19, 1982) that he has received daily telephone threats since the article appeared.

The July, 1981 shooting death of Duong Trong Lam, an outspoken supporter of the Hanoi government, appears to have been the work of an organized group. Lam was shot on the street at mid-day by an assailant who ran away on foot and succeeded in disappearing within two blocks of the crime. A suspect was arrested, but charges were dropped when the key witness decided he had fingered the wrong man. Lam had headed a youth service agency which received CETA funding and had been the target of threats and verbal abuse from right-wing refugee representatives. One of his colleagues reported two previous encounters with groups of three and

An anti-communist guerrilla force is allegedly fighting the Vietnamese government—and needs money from refugees here.

four Vietnamese men who claimed to be armed and intending to kill Lam because he was a "communist." Eight hours after the murder, someone in Las Vegas mailed a communique signed by the Anti-Communist Viets' Organization (ACVO) claiming that, "ACVO has decided to punish Lam Trong Duong. The punishment has been carried out. . . ." It added, "ACVO warns those with Vietnam origin living abroad, . . . They must stop taking advantage of freedom of the free world to lengthen the suffering of Vietnamese people, . . ."

But the San Francisco Police Department is "not treating this murder as political," according to Inspector Napoleon Hendrix. The suspect police arrested was a colleague of Lam's and apparently shared his political views. No further suspects have been named since charges were dropped, and sources close to the case say the police were under pressure from the mayor's office to conclude the investigation quickly. Whether or not there is ever legal proof that Lam was murdered for his political activities, his death was interpreted as a threat by other Vietnamese expressing sympathy for the Hanoi government.

There is no doubt about the political character of the Molotov cocktail attack on Harvard-trained historian Ngo Vinh Long in April, 1981, however. Long was attacked—the bomb failed to explode—as he departed from a panel discussion at which he had been the only speaker not hostile to the Vietnamese government. Panel organizer Steven Young, a former U.S. AID officer in Vietnam, had baited



Mark Richards

Arrival processing begins with immigration forms for Indochinese refugees arriving in Oakland.

Long during the discussion, describing him as a representative of the Hanoi government—much to the anger of the anti-communist audience. Leaflets circulated before the event in the Vietnamese community had called for "patriots" to attack the "traitor." Young is believed to have provided information about the panel to the leaflet writers. Long's assailant was caught at the site by two Harvard policemen who were escorting Long to safety. A year later he was acquitted of all charges, including attempted murder, on the grounds of insanity. The defense argued that he suffered "post traumatic stress syndrome" because of his harrowing experiences during the war and in a reeducation camp in Vietnam, and news coverage of the trial focused on this rather than on the threat to Long. The organized intimidation of Long—which has continued, requiring him to summon police on several later occasions—has nothing to do with the psychological state of a single individual, however.

The climate of fear among Vietnamese is now such that Vietnamese who want to discuss current conditions at home with any sympathy for the current government do it in secret. Invitations to meet with occasional visiting Vietnamese scholars, scientists, and diplomats are issued only to trusted friends, because a public announcement would subject participants to the danger of physical attack. In such a context, refugees who have left behind virtually everything they loved have no opportunity to learn and understand more about developments at home or to find ways to make return visits. Instead, the only hope they are offered is a chimera: a guerrilla force which will topple the communist government and lead the dispossessed home in triumph.

U.S. immigration policies, which have given top priority to ruthless killers on the basis of their past cooperation with the United States, made the current rule of terror possible. Continued official U.S. hostility to Vietnam makes it easy for a new set of warlords to enforce anti-communist orthodoxy, because the entire U.S. government seems to stand behind them, and dissidents have a hard time finding protection, much less support. Ironically, Vietnamese who came to the United States seeking refuge are likely to find it only if the U.S. government stops defining them as the victims of communist oppression and begins to make peace with the Socialist Republic of Vietnam. □

EAST TIMOR

Recent reports of famine and human rights violations in East Timor have once again brought international attention to Indonesia's occupation of that island nation. Timorese Catholic church sources say that famine threatens the strife-torn districts of Viqueque and Baucau in the eastern part of Timor. The same sources point to the imprisonment of 3,785 relatives of Fretilin guerrillas on Atauro island off of the Timorese capital of Dili.

The introduction in April of a joint U.S. House and Senate resolution calling on the Indonesians to withdraw from East Timor, followed by an official inquiry by the Australian parliament in May, have provided the political foci for an Indonesian campaign to neutralize these reports. Several foreign correspondents were allowed to visit East Timor in May. But if the Indonesians thought they could get good political mileage out of the exercise, they were wrong.

The stories of Rod Nordland for the *Philadelphia Enquirer* and the *Melbourne Age* tell a harrowing tale of mass murders of men, women and children during Indonesian counterinsurgency operations, widespread hunger and malnutrition even in Dili, the capital, and the imprisonment of thousands of relatives of Fretilin fighters under brutal conditions.

Indonesian attempts to tailor the journalists' visit to secure a favorable impression were easily overwhelmed by open dissatisfaction among large segments of the population. Inept Indonesian officials did not help their cause much. Col. A.P. Kalangie, the top Indonesian official in Timor, claimed for example that there was a 50,000-ton surplus in food grains in an attempt to counteract reports of famine. Other sources said this claim is absurd since a normal good harvest is only 90,000 to 100,000 tons.

The attempt to portray an "improving situation" by *Asian Wall Street Journal* correspondent Barry Wain could not get around the fact that even the "improved situation" remained grim. Wain's report on Indonesian economic development efforts, for example, were counterposed to his own account of the Indonesian military's monopoly on trade in coffee and sandalwood, Timor's only exports.

UNITED STATES

It could become illegal to send money to friends or relatives in Vietnam if Representative Don Bailey (D-Pa.) has his way. Bailey introduced a bill which would prohibit "any person from exporting from the United States any currency directly or indirectly to any person in Vietnam" in the House Foreign Affairs Committee on June 24.

HR 6687 would punish violators with a fine of \$10,000 or a year in prison or both. It permits the President to suspend the act if he determines that Vietnam "is returning to Viet Nam those Vietnamese nationals that the government has sent against their will to other Communist countries."

According to David Flanders, Bailey's legislative aide, Bailey wants to prevent the Vietnamese government from obtaining hard currency. The bill would outlaw sending money through Canada or Europe as well as directly, but it would not affect packages. Enforcement would not be easy, however, since it is difficult to prove that money sent to someone in another country has been forwarded to Vietnam.

Capitol Hill insiders doubt the bill will go anywhere. Bailey has not yet inserted it into the Congressional Record or sought sponsors, and it is unlikely to be voted on before November. But it could slip through as part of a larger bill.

VIETNAM

Vietnam is offering some new terms for settling the conflict over Kampuchea. At the close of a two-day conference of Indochinese foreign ministers in Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnamese Foreign Minister Nguyen Co Thach announced July 7 that Vietnam will withdraw some of its troops from Kampuchea. More will be withdrawn if Thailand stops offering sanctuary to anti-Phnom Penh resistance groups, Thach said.

The foreign ministers called for an international conference to bring peace to all Southeast Asia. Conference participants would include the countries of the region, plus the permanent members of the U.N. Security Council—the United States, the Soviet Union, China, Britain, and France. In the past, Vietnam has called for a regional conference on the issue which would not include any outside powers, and it refused to participate in the U.N. conference on Kampuchea in 1981.

Vietnamese diplomats say their military forces could destroy the existing resistance groups, but that the real problems come from "the powers behind the resistance." Only a political settlement will end the conflict in Kampuchea, they say.

The foreign ministers also repeated an earlier proposal for a "safety zone" along the Thai-Kampuchean border. The Kampuchean side would be patrolled by Kampuchean troops and the Thai side by Thai troops.

LAOS

The Lao People's Revolutionary Party (LPRP) took a critical look at progress since 1975 at its Third Congress in Vientiane, April 27–30. The tone of the reports echoed that of Vietnam's fifth party congress in March.

"The material and technical bases we have built and consolidated are unable to ensure that they can meet the requirements for boosting production, distributing and circulating goods and improving living conditions," commented Savan Southichak, a member of the LPRP. Premier Kaysone Phomvihane singled out party cadre who "are no longer exemplary in their conduct and have become bureaucrats alienated from the masses."

Against these shortcomings, party planners set modest goals as they laid out their first five-year plan (1981–85). In forming agricultural cooperatives, cautioned Kaysone, "there should be no coercion whatsoever," and the principle of "voluntariness" should apply. Cooperatives can be set up only "if good cadres are available and the people show willingness." Model cooperatives have been set up to "encourage peasants to embark on a collective livelihood gradually." Noting past difficulties in forcing slash-and-burn highland minority farmers to form stationary cooperatives, Kaysone advised, "We should study various forms of collectivization so that the most proper ones can be put into practice."

Vice Premier Nouthak Phoumsavan pointed with pride, however, to an increase in rice production from 700,000 tons a year in 1976 to 1.15 million tons in 1981, making 1981 "the first time we did not have to import rice." Transport problems continue to make it difficult to move rice from the rice-rich South to needy areas in the North.

The literacy campaign has reduced illiteracy to 15 percent, the Congress heard, and 100-percent literacy is expected by 1983.

The new LPRP Central Committee elected at the Congress doubled membership to 55 and included four women, three more than were on the former committee. The Central Committee is dominated by lowland Lao (79 percent), with 15 percent of the positions occupied by Lao Theung and six percent by the Hmong highland minorities. The average age of the committee is 55, considerably younger than that of the Central Committee in Vietnam.

KAMPUCHEA

The three major forces opposing the Vietnamese occupation of Kampuchea formed a coalition on June 22 in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia. Negotiations had been under way for 18 months.

Norodom Sihanouk, leader of the Moulinaka faction, is the new president of the Coalition Government of Democratic Kampuchea. Joining him as vice president is Khieu Samphan, president of the Khmer Rouge's Democratic Kampuchea government. Son Sann, leader of the Khmer People's National Liberation Front (KPNLF), is the coalition's new prime minister.

This unlikely coalition is widely viewed as a maneuver to gain international respectability and increased donations of foreign aid to bolster the struggle against the Vietnamese-backed government of Heng Samrin in Phnom Penh.

The coalition emerged after prodding from ASEAN nations and encouragement from the United States and China. Washington, which has voted repeatedly to seat the Khmer Rouge at the United Nations, welcomed the formation of the coalition. Deputy Secretary of State Walter Stoessel added, however, "I would say quite flatly that we don't plan to offer military assistance."

China offers military aid to all three factions, and unconfirmed reports list Singapore, Malaysia, and Thailand as military aid donors to the KPNLF. Indonesia has announced that it will not give military aid to the new coalition.

Cooperation among the factions is limited. Under the terms of the coalition agreement, they will share Democratic Kampuchea's seat at the United Nations. But each faction will "retain its own organization, political identity and freedom of action" and maintain its own army. Foreign aid will not be shared.

The coalition will operate under the principle of consensus. In the event of an impasse, however, the Khmer Rouge "will have the right to resume its activities as the sole legal and legitimate State of Kampuchea."

Vietnam's official communist party newspaper, *Nhan Dan*, called the new coalition a "farce."

The coalition government is expected to operate out of bases in western Kampuchea now controlled by the three forces. Khieu Samphan and Sihanouk made a joint visit to a Kampuchean refugee camp in Thailand and a base camp in Kampuchea on July 7. Sihanouk had not been inside Kampuchea since he fled house arrest under the Khmer Rouge in 1978.

AMERASIANS

Children of American fathers and Vietnamese mothers may leave Vietnam—if

reference category of the Immigration and Naturalization Act. Neither bill would reunite the children with their fathers unless the fathers chose to sponsor them. Most children would be sponsored by unrelated American citizens. The Simpson-Mazzoli bill prohibits the child's Vietnamese mother from immigrating with the child, requiring the mother to release the child in writing for emigration and adoption.

Amerasian children have been the focus of a number of press reports over the last two years, with most writers describing them as discriminated against because of their mixed paternity. Bill Herod, consultant on Indochina relations for Church World Service, lived in Vietnam over four years before 1975 and has visited there several times since. He comments, "I have seen Amerasian children all over Saigon, going to school, playing in parks, or working with their mothers—just

like full Vietnamese children. But there are some mothers of Amerasian kids who are desperate to get out of Vietnam. They maintain a separate identity, which they pass along to the children too. They are the ones who hang around the hotels and create the impressions that are written up in the American press . . . Most of the Amerasian children in Vietnam are teenagers now, and they are effectively Vietnamese. To come to the United States would be a tragic choice."

Many critics of the United States' hostile policies toward Vietnam suggest that the Amerasian children should be allowed to immigrate but that the best way to help them is to help all children in Vietnam. The United States has refused to participate in food assistance programs for Vietnam, even ignoring a 1981 emergency appeal from UNICEF requesting specific foodstuffs to prevent severe malnutrition in children.

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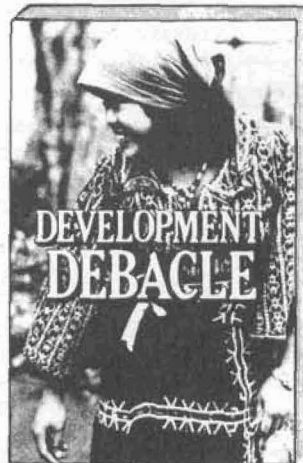
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the United States will accept them, according to Vietnamese Foreign Minister Nguyen Co Thach. Thach reaffirmed this pledge on July 7 at a news conference marking the close of a meeting of Indochinese Foreign Ministers in Ho Chi Minh City.

Two bills now pending in the U.S. Congress would grant Amerasian children special immigration rights. The Simpson-Mazzoli bill and the McKinney-Denton bill would put Amerasian children in the highest pref-

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